



TOM THOMSON

Life & Work

By David P. Silcox

ART
CANADA
INSTITUTE
INSTITUT
DE L'ART
CANADIEN



Contents

03	Biography
20	Key Works
53	Significance & Critical Issues
68	Style & Technique
76	Where to See
93	Notes
95	Glossary
104	Sources & Resources
112	About the Author
113	Copyright & Credits



BIOGRAPHY

Tom Thomson (1877–1917) is one of the greatest artists Canada ever produced, yet much of his life remains shrouded in mystery. He began as an itinerant engraver and after several years emerged as a gifted and innovative painter. This transformation started in 1909, when he found himself surrounded by a group of talented and ambitious artists in Toronto. Although Thomson was older than most of them, he learned quickly and was soon setting an example that surpassed them all. His career as an artist lasted a scant five years, but his legacy endures.

BOYHOOD YEARS

Thomas John Thomson was born on August 5, 1877, in Claremont, Ontario, a hamlet-sized farming community about fifty-five kilometres northeast of Toronto. He was the sixth child and the third son of John Thomson and Margaret J. Matheson, who had ten children in all. Documentary information about his life is sparse, though a few details were recorded in anecdotes from people who knew him.



LEFT: The Thomson children, c. 1887. *From left to right:* Henry, Tom, Elizabeth, Minnie, Fraser, George, Margaret, Ralph, Louise.
RIGHT: Quite the dandy! Tom Thomson at about the age of twenty, c. 1898.

When Thomson was two months old, his parents moved to a farm in Leith, on the Bruce Peninsula. The closest town was Owen Sound, a major shipbuilding centre and a bustling Great Lakes port. He grew up in a large music-loving family that read widely (his mother saw to that) and learned the pleasures and excitement of hunting and fishing (his father's pastimes). Most of the Thomson children liked to draw and paint, but Tom was no prodigy. The children also sang in the church choir and performed in the local band. Later in Toronto, Thomson took singing lessons and played the mandolin.

At some point Thomson was taken out of school for a year because of illness, which was described at the time as weak lungs or inflammatory rheumatism. As he wandered about in the hardwood and coniferous forests near his home, he became familiar with woodland lore. He also had the opportunity during family visits to collect specimens with Dr. William Brodie, his father's cousin, who was a well-known naturalist. In this way he learned to observe nature closely and respect its mystery. Once he recovered, he returned to his studies and may well have finished high school. Standing six feet tall, he was an easygoing, agile, and handsome young man.

EARLY ADULT YEARS

When Thomson turned twenty-one in 1898, he, like all his siblings, received an inheritance from his grandfather, after whom he had been named. His share was approximately \$2,000. Although it was a large sum at the time, there is no record about where the money went or how quickly he spent it. The following year he apprenticed at a foundry and machine shop in Owen Sound but moved on after eight months.



A hand-tinted photo of the Thomson brothers, likely taken at the Seattle Engraving Company, c. 1902. *From left to right:* Henry, Tom, George, Ralph, and Fraser.

Thomson went to Chatham, in southwest Ontario, and enrolled at the Canada Business College. Again his patience wore thin: he left after eight months and returned home for the summer of 1901. Next he headed to the Pacific Northwest, where his oldest brother, George, and a cousin had set up the Acme Business College in Seattle. Thomson worked briefly as an elevator operator at the Diller Hotel, near the waterfront. Within the year his brothers Ralph and Henry arrived in the city to join the clan.

In 1902, after six months' study at the Acme Business College, Thomson was hired as a pen artist, draftsman, and etcher at an engraving firm, Maring & Ladd (later Maring & Blake), which specialized in advertising and three-colour printing. He had learned calligraphy at the Canada Business College, and this appointment indicates that he was a quick study, with enough raw talent in lettering, drawing, and painting to produce business cards, brochures, and posters for clients. Around this time, many artists earned a good livelihood as graphic artists.

Thomson soon switched to the local Engraving Company, where, because of his skills, he was offered higher wages. However, he suddenly returned to Leith at the end of 1904, likely because his proposal of marriage had been rejected by the teenage Alice Lambert, the intense but imaginative daughter of a clergyman. Lambert went on to write romantic novels, one of which featured a young girl who was wooed by an artist and refused him, to her later regret.

GRAPHIC DESIGN IN TORONTO, 1905–13

Thomson moved to Toronto in the summer of 1905 and settled into the first of the many boarding houses he would live in over the coming years. He got a job at Legg Brothers, a photo-engraving firm, and sometimes visited his family on weekends. In his free time he read books (often poetry) and attended concerts, the theatre, and various sporting events. A few pictures taken at this time show him smartly dressed—quite the dandy. Women liked him, though at times he could be moody and quarrelsome and drink too much. Many of his friends and colleagues later described him as periodically erratic and sensitive, with fits of unreasonable despondency. Throughout his life, he was attracted to quality items—silk shirts, meals in elegant restaurants, fine pipes and tobacco. Even when he reduced his possessions to a minimum for a roving life of camping and canoeing in Algonquin Park, he still bought the best paints, brushes, and wood panels on the market.



Thomson's business card from Seattle, c. 1904.



TOM THOMSON

Life & Work by David P. Silcox



Studio portrait of Tom Thomson as a successful young commercial artist, c. 1910.

In his early days in Toronto, Thomson also seems to have taken night classes from William Cruikshank (1848–1922), a British artist well trained in the academic tradition who taught painting at the Central Ontario School of Art and Industrial Design (later the Ontario College of Art, now OCAD University). Although Thomson's friends were later critical of Cruikshank's teaching, calling him a "cantankerous old snorter" among other unflattering names, Thomson may have learned some useful techniques from him.

Around the beginning of 1909, Thomson landed at Toronto's leading commercial art and engraving firm, Grip Limited, where he specialized in design and lettering work. Albert Robson (1882–1939), the art director, recalled that when he hired Thomson, "his samples consisted mostly of lettering and decorative designs applied to booklet covers and some labels."¹ Grip produced the usual array of posters for railways and hotels, mail-order catalogues, and real estate

brochures, but Thomson's life immediately began to change because of the people he met there. The senior artist was J.E.H. MacDonald (1873–1932), who encouraged his staff to foster their talents by painting outdoors in their spare time—in the city's ravines and the nearby countryside. Robson obviously appreciated artists, and he hired Thomson on a hunch. Over the next three years he hired Arthur Lismer (1885–1969) and Fred Varley (1881–1969), both fresh from England, and Franklin Carmichael (1890–1945). Through MacDonald, Thomson met Lawren Harris (1885–1970) at the Arts and Letters Club, a convivial meeting place and eatery for men interested in literature, theatre, architecture, and art.² At that point Thomson's circle of friends and influences was almost complete: except for Robson, these men were all future members of the Group of Seven.

When Robson moved to Grip's main competitor, Rous and Mann Limited, in the fall of 1912, most of his loyal staff, including Thomson, followed him.³ Inevitably they found much of their work boring, but they appreciated the freedom Robson gave them to take art classes or leave for extended painting trips during the summer. Very few examples from Thomson's years at Grip or Rous and Mann can be firmly attributed to him, though the pieces that exist reveal some of the elements and decorative patterns that marked his later paintings. One beautifully lettered and illustrated verse by Robert Burns exists in at least three versions (c. 1906, 1907, and 1909). An untitled ink drawing of a lakeshore scene from around 1913, like so many of his sketches, depicts a low range of hills across the lake, with a few trees in the foreground.



William Cruikshank, *Breaking a Road*, 1894, oil on canvas, 93 x 175.6 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Cruikshank was probably Thomson's first and only art instructor.



LEFT: Tom Thomson, *View from the Windows of Grip Ltd.*, c. 1908-10, gouache and watercolour on paper, 15 x 10.3 cm, City of Toronto Art Collection. This sketch was found in Thomson's sketch box after his death. RIGHT: The Art Room, Grip Limited, Toronto, c. 1911-12. Seated fourth from the left, Tom Thomson, with William Broadhead, Arthur Lismer, and F.H. Varley standing behind. J.E.H. MacDonald is seated next to the right across the aisle.

DISCOVERING ALGONQUIN PARK

In 1912 Thomson bought an oil-sketching kit for painting outdoors. With a Grip colleague, Ben Jackson (1871-1952), he took his first canoe trip early that spring in Algonquin Park, an enormous recreation and forested area criss-crossed by rivers and streams about three hundred kilometres northeast of Toronto. To accommodate the wealthy holidaymakers and outdoors types who flocked there by rail, it offered a mix of posh hotels and modest lodges; hikers and canoeists could camp by one of the myriad lakes. In the backwoods, as they cut numerous trails and roads, teams of loggers had built dams, sluices, and chutes. Thomson recorded one of these decaying dams in *Old Lumber Dam, Algonquin Park*, 1912—a sketch that illustrates his transition from the formalities of commercial art to a more imaginative style of original painting.



Tom Thomson, *Old Lumber Dam, Algonquin Park*, 1912, oil on paperboard, 15.5 x 21.3 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Once Thomson left the commercial art room for the backwoods, his painting style loosened up dramatically.

In the fall Thomson set out on a two-month canoe trip with another artist friend from Grip, William Broadhead (1888–1960), up the Spanish River and into the Mississagi Forest Reserve (now an Ontario provincial park). There they explored the rough and beautiful terrain north of Manitoulin Island and Georgian Bay while Thomson honed his canoeing skills. They had two bad spills, however, in which he lost almost all his oil sketches and several rolls of exposed film.

The precision of *Drowned Land*, 1912, reveals the rapid progress Thomson was making as an artist at this time. To cap this astonishing year in which the late-blooming Thomson began the transition from commercial artist to full-time painter, in October J.E.H. MacDonald (1873–1932) introduced him to Dr. James MacCallum, a professor of ophthalmology at the University of Toronto who visited the Ontario Society of Artists exhibitions and was particularly interested in landscape paintings. Just over a year later, in the fall of 1913, MacCallum introduced Thomson to A.Y. Jackson (1882–1974)—a well-trained artist who had recently returned from his third visit to France. There he had studied at the Académie Julian and travelled widely on painting trips in Italy, France, and England. Harris and MacCallum had been impressed by Jackson's painting *The Edge of the Maple Wood*, 1910, which they regarded as



A. Curtis Williamson, *Portrait of Dr. J.M. MacCallum ("A Cynic")*, 1917, oil on canvas, 67.5 x 54.9 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. From 1913 on, MacCallum was the key supporter for Thomson and the Group of Seven.

a fresh approach to the Canadian landscape and which Harris purchased. Encouraged by their invitation, Jackson moved from Montreal to Toronto—and in due course became a member of the Group of Seven.

Recognizing the talent of these two unknown artists, Jackson and Thomson, MacCallum offered to cover their expenses for a year if they would devote themselves full time to painting. As he later recalled, when he first saw Thomson's sketches from 1912, he recognized their "truthfulness ... they made me feel that the North had gripped Thomson," just as it had gripped him too as a boy.⁴ Both men accepted MacCallum's offer. Although Thomson did not realize it at the time, he had found in MacCallum a patron, a staunch supporter, and a guardian of his paintings after his death.⁵

THOMSON'S EARLY PAINTINGS

In 1913 Thomson began going with colleagues from Rous and Mann on weekend painting trips to Lake Scugog or other rural and sparsely inhabited places not far from Toronto. Although his early efforts, such as *Northern Lake*, 1912-13, or *Evening*, 1913, are neither sophisticated nor technically outstanding, they show more than average ability in their composition and handling of colour. When they saw works such as *View from the Windows of Grip Ltd.*, c. 1908-10, his astute friends began to realize that he was not the amateur artist he thought himself to be.



Tom Thomson, *Northern Lake*, 1912-13, oil on canvas, 71.7 x 102.4 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. This painting, the first Thomson ever sold, was purchased by the Government of Ontario from the Ontario Society of Artists exhibition in 1913.

In January that year Lawren Harris (1885–1970) and J.E.H. MacDonald (1873–1932) had visited the *Exhibition of Contemporary Scandinavian Art* at the Albright Art Gallery (now Albright-Knox Art Gallery) in Buffalo. They were struck by the similarities between the raw Scandinavian landscape depicted in the paintings there and Canada's, and they returned with a catalogue annotated with their observations. This show proved to be a turning point in Canadian art: from then on, these influential painters imbued their colleagues, including Thomson, with the ambition to create a national art movement for Canada, based on the country's unspoiled "northern" character. Their enthusiasm culminated in the formation of the Group of Seven in March 1920.

Significantly, not one of these friends attended another exhibition that took place in New York in February–March 1913: the Armory Show (formally the *International Exhibition of Modern Art*), which brought the most avant-garde modernist art of Europe and America to New York and caused a sensation. Their focus was indeed inward; yet this attitude may be exactly what, in the end, produced an outward identity for Canada.⁶

On his way back to Toronto that same fall, Thomson stopped in Huntsville and may have visited Winifred Trainor, whose family had a cottage on Canoe Lake in Algonquin Park. Later, she was rumoured to be engaged to Thomson for a marriage in the fall of 1917, but the records are thin, and she remains one of the mysteries in his life story.

PAINTING FULL TIME

During his year of support from Dr. James MacCallum in 1914, Thomson became hooked on painting. Initially he had been reluctant to accept the doctor's offer, but, encouraged by the sale of *Northern Lake*, 1912–13—a work he had shown in the 1913 spring exhibition of the Ontario Society of Artists—for \$250 to the Ontario government, he decided he would devote his life to making art. He settled into a regular pattern: every spring he headed north to Algonquin Park as early as possible and stayed there as long as he could into the fall.

Thomson spent the three to four winter months in Toronto painting canvases in the Studio Building at 25 Severn Street. Planned and financed by Lawren Harris (1885–1970) and MacCallum, this structure was built in 1913–14 and comprised six studios, each with large north-facing windows, storage racks, and a small sleeping mezzanine. Thomson and Jackson moved into Studio 1 in January 1914, before construction was complete. They shared the rent of \$22 a month until Jackson joined the army at the end of the year, though both of them were away on painting trips during much of that time. By early 1915, given his plan to spend two-thirds of every year away from Toronto, Thomson had decided to move into the shed behind the Studio Building. Harris fixed it up for him with a new roof, floor, studio window, stove, and electricity and charged him rent of a dollar a month.



This photograph by Tom Thomson, c. 1914, may have been of Winifred Trainor.



The Studio Building, designed by Eden Smith and financed by Lawren Harris and Dr. MacCallum, was completed in 1914.



Tom Thomson's shack, behind the Studio Building at 25 Severn Street, c. 1915, where he lived and painted during the last three winters of his life.

A STARTLING DEBUT

Thomson split the spring and summer of 1914 three ways: first in Algonquin Park (April-May), then in Georgian Bay (June-July), and finally in the park again (August-mid-November). He and Arthur Lismer (1885-1969) painted together in May, and during his two months in Georgian Bay he explored the area around Dr. James MacCallum's cottage at Go Home Bay.

Although the war in Europe erupted in August, Thomson and A.Y. Jackson (1882-1974) met up for an early fall canoe trip in the park, where they were joined on their return by Lismer and Fred Varley (1881-1969), along with their English wives. This trip marked the first time that three members of the future Group of Seven painted together, and the only occasion they worked with Thomson. In their eyes he was a real outdoors expert: they were astounded by his ability to catch fish for the evening meal, cook over an open fire, set up camp, and navigate the rapids in a canoe.



Tom Thomson (*back left*) with his city visitors (*left to right*) F.H. Varley, A.Y. Jackson, and Arthur, Marjorie, and Esther Lismer in Algonquin Park, fall 1914. Photograph likely taken by Maud Varley. Thomson seems to have learned a lot from painting and talking art with these three artists for a few days, and his work immediately became freer in its flow and expression.

In terms of his painting career, 1914 was a turning point for Thomson. The National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, under director Eric Brown (and advised by board member Lawren Harris [1885–1970]), began to acquire Thomson's work, first *Moonlight*, 1913–14, from the Ontario Society of Artists exhibition for \$150; then *Northern River*, 1915, the following year for \$500; and a year later *Spring Ice*, 1915–16, for \$300. Such recognition was remarkable for an emerging, unknown artist, though the money he received was not sufficient to live on. Thomson, however, never paid much attention to managing his career. He didn't even give titles to most of his paintings or date them. After Thomson's death, MacCallum in particular looked after those details.

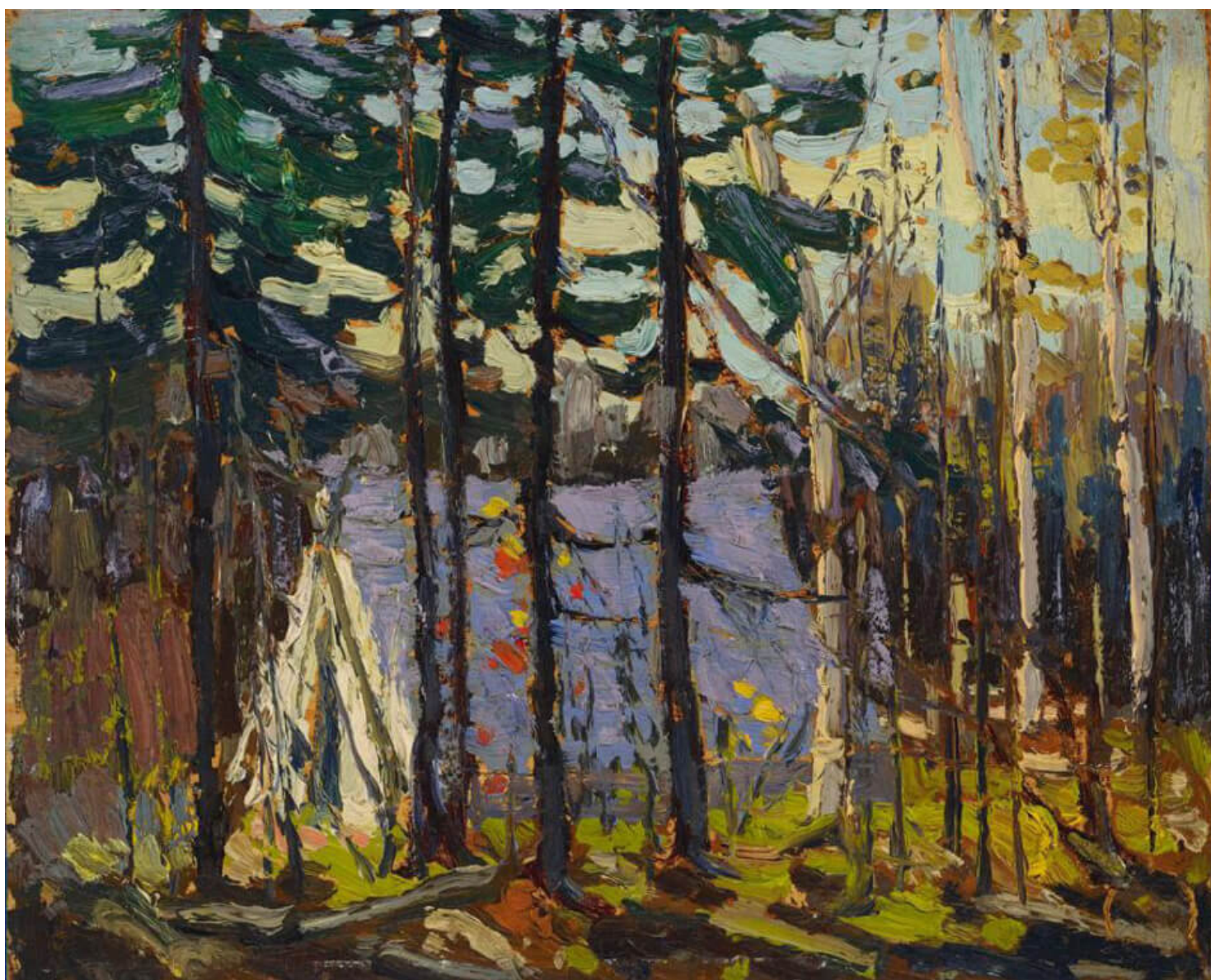


Tom Thomson, *Moonlight*, 1913–14, oil on canvas, 52.9 x 77.1 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. This painting was the first of many works by Thomson that the National Gallery purchased, both during his life and later from his estate.

Everyone expected that the war in France would soon end, but as the months wore on, Jackson decided to enlist, followed by Varley and Harris. Thomson, although he had just turned thirty-seven, attempted to join up more than once, but he was not accepted—apparently because of his flat feet. Some of the other residents in Algonquin Park opposed his patriotic views about the war, and at times they argued angrily about Canada's involvement in the conflict. Thomson expressed his anguish about the war in sketches such as *Fire-Swept Hills*, 1915, which echoed the turmoil, destruction, and death that was sweeping across France and Belgium.

GATHERING MOMENTUM, 1915

Thomson spent the spring and summer of 1915 on long trips in different sections of Algonquin Park. A new cedar-strip canoe and a silk tent added to his pleasures and comforts, and his small oil sketches on wood panels mounted up impressively. He made little effort to sell them, and he generously gave many away to people who admired them. Only the canvases he sold brought in some money. To make ends meet, once Dr. James MacCallum's year of support had ended, he worked as a fire ranger or fishing guide whenever he could.



Tom Thomson, *Artist's Camp, Canoe Lake, Algonquin Park*, 1915, oil on wood, 21.9 x 27.2 cm, Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Over the years, Thomson painted at least four images of his tent.

In the fall Thomson joined J.E.H. MacDonald (1873–1932) at MacCallum's cottage to measure the walls for a series of seven commissioned decorative panels. He then returned to the park, where he remained until the weather drove him back to Toronto at the end of November. He painted MacCallum's panels that winter, but when it came time to install them in the spring, they didn't all quite fit and four were returned to Toronto. MacCallum bequeathed the panels to the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, in 1943, along with eighty-five of Thomson's paintings and oil sketches from his collection.



Tom Thomson, *Decorative Panel (III)*, 1915-16, oil on beaverboard, 120.8 x 96.2 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. One of four decorative panels painted for the living room of the MacCallum cottage at Go Home Bay.



Tom Thomson, *Decorative Panel (IV)*, 1915-16, oil on beaverboard, 120.8 x 96.4 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. The panels were not installed because they proved to be too large for the designated location. Ultimately, Thomson painted another set of four panels for that space.

The sketch Thomson made for *Opulent October*, 1915-16, that fall is a prime example of his increasing artistic power. The sketch itself is not particularly brilliant, but over the winter, using it as a model, Thomson recreated it as a good-sized canvas—a process that proved to be a breakthrough for him. Once he discovered he could make a gigantic leap from a sketch to a completely different treatment of the subject, his full range of abilities—mental, aesthetic, technical, and emotional—were liberated to create his most remarkable works.

AT FULL SPEED, 1916

Lawren Harris (1885-1970) and Dr. James MacCallum joined Thomson for an early spring canoe trip in Algonquin Park in 1916, after which he worked for a month or more as a ranger at the eastern end of the park. Again, and despite such distractions for the artist, Thomson's stack of sketches continued to grow, diverse in subject matter, varied in composition, vivid in colour, thick with vigorously applied pigment, and inspired by the landscape and the region he understood so deeply.

Over the winter of 1916-17, Thomson, with strong encouragement from Harris, J.E.H. MacDonald (1873-1932), and MacCallum, enjoyed the most productive months of his life. He tackled ten major canvases in all, culminating in his two greatest achievements on canvas: *The West Wind*, 1916-17, and *The Jack Pine*, 1916-17. Both paintings were based on small sketches he had painted in the spring of 1916.



Tom Thomson, *The West Wind*, 1916-17, oil on canvas, 120.7 x 137.9 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Thomson often featured a tree by a lake in his images, and here he captures the effects of a windy day on sky, water surface, and branches of a lone pine. Arthur Lismer saw this painting as symbolic of the Canadian character—as firm and resolute against adversity.

FINAL SPRING, 1917

The sketches from the spring and early summer of 1917 confirm that Thomson had risen to an even higher artistic plateau. His work from this period, such as *The Rapids*, 1917, demonstrates the assured hand with which he created his compositions; through his colours and treatment of the atmosphere, viewers can sense the chill or the warmth in the air—as in *Path behind Mowat Lodge*, spring 1917, or *Tea Lake Dam*, summer 1917. His brush strokes became bold and expressive, and he seemed to be moving inexorably toward abstraction.



Tom Thomson, *The Rapids*, 1917, oil on wood panel, 21.6 x 26.7 cm, private collection. This painting initially belonged to Thomson's friend A.Y. Jackson. As he told his niece Dr. Naomi Groves Jackson, "He chose this work after Thomson's death because he could never paint a river the way Thomson did."



Tom Thomson, *Spring Flood*, 1917, oil on wood panel, 21.2 x 26.8 cm, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. Here in a few quick, expressive brush strokes, Thomson captures the melting ice and snow amid the promise of an early spring.

Dr. James MacCallum described Thomson's paintings as an "Encyclopedia of the North," a visual account of the terrain in every season, time of day, and kind of weather. Algonquin Park, much as Thomson loved it, however, could not remain an infinite source of inspiration if he was to continue to grow in stature as an artist. That spring of 1917, Thomson seems to have been eager to extend his exploration of northern subjects—and his treatment of them in his paintings. He had just had the most productive period of his life in his studio in Toronto, and his sketches show clearly that he was brimming with new ideas about what he could capture and reveal in his forthcoming paintings.

A MYSTERIOUS DEATH

On the morning of July 8, 1917, several people saw Thomson with Shannon Fraser, the owner of Mowat Lodge where Thomson often stayed, walking toward the Joe Lake dam. Mark Robinson, the park ranger, noted in his diary that Thomson "left Fraser's Dock after 12:30 pm to go to Tea Lake Dam or West Lake."⁷ Thomson's body was found in Canoe Lake eight days later, on July 16, and was immediately interred in a nearby grave. The Thomson family sent an undertaker from Huntsville to remove the body and transport it to Leith, for burial in the family plot at the cemetery there. The official cause of death was given as accidental drowning, though a four-inch cut on Thomson's right temple was noted.



Tom Thomson, *Mowat Lodge (or Fraser's Lodge)*, 1915, oil on panel, 21.9 x 27 cm, Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton. When it was too cold to camp out in his tent in Algonquin Park, Thomson often stayed at Mowat Lodge, where workers at the local lumber mill lived.



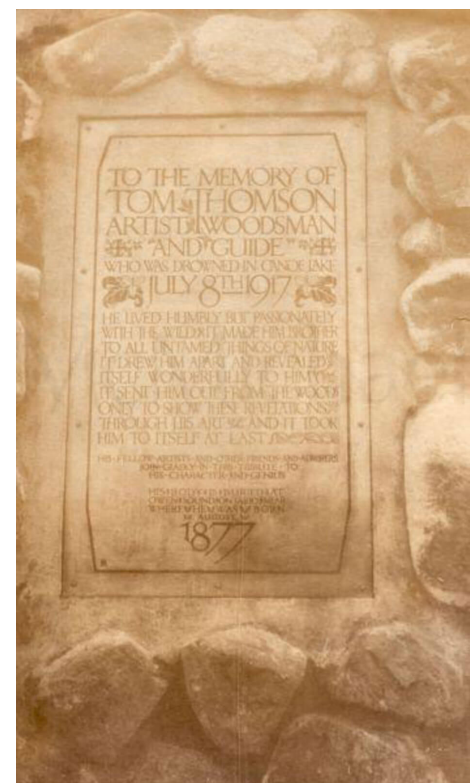
Tom Thomson at Tea Lake Dam, Algonquin Park, 1916. To earn needed money, Thomson sometimes worked as a guide or fire ranger in Algonquin Park. He became as familiar with logging scenes as with nature in the park and painted them both.

J.E.H. MacDonald (1873–1932) designed a bronze plaque to commemorate the life of his close friend and fellow painter. Soon after, he and the artist J.W. Beatty (1869–1941) set it into a cairn on a promontory overlooking Canoe Lake. It reads:

TO THE MEMORY OF
TOM THOMSON
ARTIST, WOODSMAN
AND GUIDE
WHO WAS DROWNED IN CANOE LAKE
JULY 8TH, 1917.
HE LIVED HUMBLY BUT PASSIONATELY
WITH THE WILD. IT MADE HIM BROTHER
TO ALL UNTAMED THINGS OF NATURE.
IT DREW HIM APART AND REVEALED
ITSELF WONDERFULLY TO HIM.
IT SENT HIM OUT FROM THE WOODS
ONLY TO SHOW THESE REVELATIONS
THROUGH HIS ART AND IT TOOK
HIM TO ITSELF AT LAST.

HIS FELLOW ARTISTS AND OTHER FRIENDS AND ADMIRERS
JOIN GLADLY IN THIS TRIBUTE TO
HIS CHARACTER AND GENIUS.

HIS BODY IS BURIED AT
OWEN SOUND ONTARIO NEAR
WHERE HE WAS BORN
AUGUST
1877.



The cairn constructed in memory of Tom Thomson at Canoe Lake, Algonquin Park. Photograph by J.E.H. MacDonald, September 1917.



KEY WORKS

In less than a decade as a painter, Tom Thomson produced around fifty canvases and four hundred or more small sketches on a variety of boards and panels, none much larger than 21.6 x 26.7 cm. Today they are regarded as some of Canada's strongest and most popular images of the North, even if the sites Thomson painted constituted much less pristine wilderness than is usually acknowledged. Many other artists lived longer and created more works than he did, yet achieved much less.

BURNS' BLESSING 1906

Tom Thomson, *Burns' Blessing*, 1906

Watercolour, gouache, and ink on paper, 29.3 x 22 cm

Tom Thomson Art Gallery, Owen Sound, Ontario

As a commercial artist, Tom Thomson was considered a particularly good letterman.¹ Illustrated verses such as *Burns' Blessing* show he could make an attractive context for short, sentimental poems. He used this text by Robert Burns at least twice more, in 1907 and 1909. In addition, he illustrated verses by Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Engelbert Humperdinck, Maurice Maeterlinck, Henry van Dyke, and Rudyard Kipling.

Thomson presented *Burns' Blessing* to his brother Ralph as a wedding gift, on December 25, 1906.² The most promising feature is the stylized landscape illustration that surrounds the verse. The detail in the foliage, rocks, and water in the lower part is skillfully painted, while the two puffy clouds in the upper part foreshadow Thomson's love affair with skies in all their variety—storms, lightning, rainbows, and sunsets. Although the calligraphy is very fine, the landscape pushes the verse into the background.

A.Y. Jackson (1882-1974) later wrote that in Toronto, there was little distinction between commercial artists and painters: commercial artists painted, and painters worked in the commercial arts to make a living.³ But so long as Thomson was employed as a commercial designer, his art showed little or no originality. His layouts were conventional; his colours, saccharine. His only ambition seems to have been making pleasant souvenirs. He was a true amateur artist. However, he learned to work quickly and accurately during these years and, along with the conventions of the decorative Art Nouveau style, absorbed important lessons about colour, composition, simplicity, and appeal. Once he found his stride as a painter, both his sketches and his larger canvases were easy to grasp. He became a man transformed—an artist with purpose, ideas, confidence, and enormous talent.



Tom Thomson, *Decorative Illustration: A Blessing by Robert Burns*, 1909, watercolour and ink over graphite on paperboard, 34.9 x 24.1 cm, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.

DROWNED LAND 1912

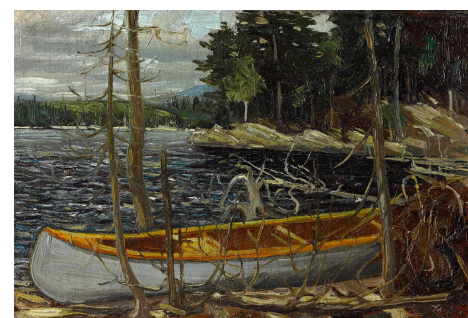


Tom Thomson, *Drowned Land*, 1912
 Oil on paper on plywood, 17.5 x 25.1 cm
 Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

Drowned Land marks the beginning of the brief arc of Thomson's years as a painter. Compared with other colourful works from 1912, such as *Old Lumber Dam*, *Algonquin Park*, or *The Canoe*, it is outstanding for its composition and precision, and shows how Thomson was attracted by scenes or subjects usually ignored by other artists.

The drowned land, perhaps near Lake Scugog or Owen Sound, is the work of enterprising beavers or loggers who, by damming a creek, have drowned a section of meadow and forest at the edge of a lake. The recovering second growth is clearly visible in the background. The painting shows Thomson's obsessive attention to detail—a constant in his work even as he pursued more complicated ideas and ways of painting his "northern" landscapes. The camera-like precision, the perfectly calibrated perspective, and the exact sense of scale are paramount. These characteristics stand out against a broad sky bereft of detail.

Thomson was blessed with exceptionally keen vision and penetrating insight. While painting, he saw things as though in a trance, with finely tuned microscope eyes and wide-angle vision. As he developed his enthusiasm and



Tom Thomson, *The Canoe*, 1912, oil on canvas on wood, 17.3 x 25.3 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. This sketch shows that Thomson was still groping toward his personal form of expression because his later discoveries of light and colour make this good painting rather dark and dull by comparison.



TOM THOMSON

Life & Work by David P. Silcox

his skill, he was able to rely on this total concentration and keen perception to guide his hand and brush—whether he was painting super-realistically, as in *Drowned Land*, or loading paint onto a panel with broad strokes in a frenzy of insight and inspiration, as in *Fire-Swept Hills*, 1915. In all of Thomson's paintings, accuracy of the subject and of his emotional reaction at the time is what gives his work both authority and power.

After years of working in commercial art (from 1902 to 1913), Thomson needed some proof of his innate talent and ability to make the shift to fine art. This painting provides that assurance and heralds the change in his status in no uncertain terms.

NORTHERN RIVER 1914–15



Tom Thomson, *Northern River*, 1914–15

Oil on canvas, 115.1 x 102 cm

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Writing to his friend and patron Dr. James MacCallum, Thomson referred to *Northern River* as his “swamp picture”—an amusing if self-deprecating label. As with so many of Thomson’s paintings, the subject is an ordinary one he might have found in almost any of the places he travelled. What he has done,

however, is take a scene common to Algonquin Park and, with tense concentration, transform it into an extraordinary one. As viewers thread their way around and through the receding mesh of branches, they encounter an array of riches: a glimpse of the full autumn colours and their reflections on the river's surface, or a line of sight through to the bend in the river or even to the hill in the distance on the right. The National Gallery of Canada, swayed by the painting's distinct originality when it was exhibited in 1915, purchased it for \$500.

With this painting, Thomson shows his ability to transform a sketch into a successful studio painting. The elaborate gouache study for this large image established the structure, but Thomson must have realized that the canvas needed a different, livelier treatment. Gouache on illustration board reflects more light than does oil on canvas, so for the painting Thomson transforms the study drastically. Behind the black scrim of tall trees, he keys up the colours of the foreground and the shore with reds, oranges, and yellows. The sky, which in the gouache blends more with the board, in the canvas is as convoluted and heavily textured as the rest of the painting.

Thomson's recreation of the small sketch (a process also critical to the success of later paintings such as *Opulent October*, 1915-16, *The Jack Pine*, 1916-17, *The West Wind*, 1916-17, and several other canvases, including *Pine Island*, *Georgian Bay*, 1914-16, *Burnt Land*, 1915, and *Spring Ice*, 1915-16) was one of his artistic strengths—something that comes to the fore with this work. His friends in the future Group of Seven, in contrast, lost the intimacy and scale of their sketches in the studio and always seem to have a degree of rigidity in the large canvases they painted from small oil sketches. Thomson was finally able to avoid this starchiness by finding within himself enough of the emotional fervour he had felt when he painted the sketch, or enough imagination to paint a new painting inspired by the sketch.

David Milne (1881-1953), a major Canadian painter and a shrewd critic, described the painting quite differently in a letter to Harry McCurry of the National Gallery in 1932: "Just plain impossible, but he has done it, it stirs you. Any painter who has ever worked on this overlying pattern motive will realize at once that this is tackling a complication beyond reason. A great point in Thomson's favour this, and his lack of perfection. I am wary of craftsmanship. It is nothing in itself, neither emotion nor creation." Then, referring to Thomson's untimely death, he added, "I rather think it would have been wiser to have taken your ten most prominent Canadians and sunk them in Canoe Lake—and saved Tom Thomson."¹ Perhaps being "beyond reason" explains the bewitching quality of *Northern River*.



Tom Thomson, *Study for "Northern River,"* 1914-15, gouache, brush, and ink over graphite on illustration board, 30 x 26.7 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. The masterful arrangement of such a complex subject, visually speaking, was Thomson's first real tour de force. David Milne wasn't the only artist who, based on this work, put Thomson at the top of his list of great Canadian artists.

SUNSET 1915



Tom Thomson, *Sunset*, 1915

Oil on composite wood-pulp board, 21.6 x 26.7 cm

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Thomson sketched this scene from a canoe, almost at water level, with the universe wrapped around him. He portrays the sunset in shocking hues and agitated brushwork, with a blazing reflection in the lake that doubles its allure, magic, and power. He paints not just crimson clouds but an acid yellow-and-green sky behind them. His constant preoccupation with skies, clouds, and sunsets reached a peak with this painting as he entered the most productive and accomplished period of his short career (1915–17). With this small image, he takes liberties and soars above mere documentation, capturing the brilliance, drama, and fleeting nature of a sunset in Algonquin Park.

The shoreline slices across the painting at a point close to the “golden section,” creating a pleasant ratio of expansive sky to the dark land beneath. After his first summer in Algonquin Park, in 1913 Thomson used this pattern in numerous paintings—a narrow foreground band of water, a distant shoreline, and an overarching sky. He repeated it in some of the other sunset paintings he created, though always with variations. *Sunset Sky*, 1915, which is quite different in effect and colour, is close to this painting in composition—both the sky and the distant shore are reflected in the lake’s surface, with the dark shore carving two parallel tracks across the lower part of the panel. *Sunset*, also 1915, is much more abstract and loosely painted, though it has the same low point of view and the same emphasis on the clouds.



Tom Thomson, *Sky* (“*The Light That Never Was*”), 1913, oil on canvas board, 17.5 x 25.1 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. The painting’s back is inscribed, probably by Dr. James MacCallum, “Thomson saw this in early morning—Had spent all night in his / canoe out on the Lake because of the flies.”

Thomson was enthralled by clouds in all their variety—clouds in stormy weather, puffy clouds on bright summer days, clouds bringing rain or snow, or clouds, as in *Sunset*, setting the sky on fire. The blood-soaked sunsets painted by the Norwegian artist Edvard Munch (1863–1944) had startled the world in the mid-1880s after Krakatoa, in 1883, blew tons of volcanic ash into the atmosphere to produce sunsets never seen before. Nature gave Thomson similar assistance in 1915 after the volcanic eruption of California’s Lassen Peak in May that year—the “Great Explosion”—caused spectacular sunsets in the northern hemisphere.¹

PINE TREES AT SUNSET 1915

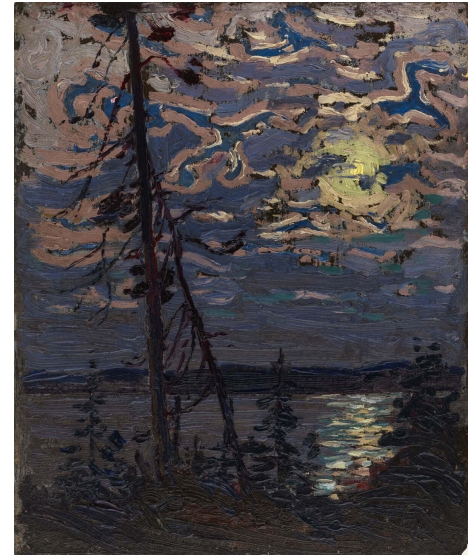
Tom Thomson, *Pine Trees at Sunset*, 1915
Oil on board, 26.7 x 21 cm
Private collection, Calgary

One of the reasons *Pines Trees at Sunset* is special is because it is firmly related to *The Jack Pine*, 1916-17, one of Thomson's greatest canvases. He painted *The Jack Pine* during the winter after he had earlier sketched this luminous sunset. The three scraggly, silhouetted pines with their clumps of branches, surrounded by young-growth trees, are set against a gorgeous and arresting sky.

Here Thomson lays out not only the parameters of the colour scheme he uses in *The Jack Pine* but, to some extent, the composition as well. The colours used in the sky—an orangey-yellow worthy of Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890)—thickly and frenetically applied, slowly give way at the top of the painting to a strangely acidic green. The surface of the water reflects the sky. Without doubt, this sketch must have been much in Thomson's mind when he painted *The Jack Pine*.

In this relatively rare vertical oil sketch, Thomson captures the transition as day slides toward night in the North. Thomson was drawn to these dramatic events—sunsets, dawns, rainbows, lightning, thunderclouds, breaking storms, first snow, frost, and ice on trees—along with the northern lights, migratory flights of geese, the spring melting of river ice, a marsh baking under a hot summer sun, and logs tumbling downstream.

These subjects from nature were at the core of Thomson's thought and creation. He focused on presenting his experiences with the natural world and on conveying his reactions to it. He did this in a way that reflected the sensibilities of the period in which he lived. As he gained experience and skill, he increasingly stretched the boundaries of the painting conventions he had learned.



Tom Thomson, *Moonlight*, c. 1913-14, oil on board, 26.4 x 21.6 cm, private collection. Here, in a vertical sketch of similar size, Thomson captures another natural event – the tranquil beauty of a moonlit night.

FIRE-SWEPT HILLS 1915



Tom Thomson, *Fire-Swept Hills*, 1915
Oil on composite wood-pulp board, 23.2 x 26.7 cm
The Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

This agitated and chaotically messy elegy to what was once a mature forest illustrates powerfully an unexpected aspect of Thomson's paintings in Algonquin Park: his reaction to the land after fire has swept through and ravaged it. Along with about ten other sketches, including *Burned Over Land*, 1916, *Burnt Area with Ragged Rocks*, 1915, *Burnt-Over Forest*, 1916, *Burnt Land at Sunset*, 1915, and *Burnt Country, Evening*, 1914, it refutes any idea that Thomson found only idyllic peace, beauty, and uplifting scenes to paint there.

As the painting spills out from the high, distant horizon point between two hills, the charred spindles of trees standing precariously like lifeless skeletons remind viewers constantly of fire and destruction. In the lower half, a tumble of paint crashes over rocks and more burnt trunks and branches like a wild cataract. Blood reds, blues, ash greys, and whites, all jumbled and mashed violently together, complete this statement of confusion and disorder.

A case can be made that at this time Thomson's preoccupation with the war manifested itself in a number of his paintings that depict the destruction and chaos caused by forest fires, flooding, and storms. He had tried to enlist for service but was rejected.

Meanwhile, his friend A.Y. Jackson (1882–1974) had volunteered in Europe, where he also painted the battlefield, as in *A Copse, Evening*, 1918; and Lawren Harris (1885–1970) and Fred Varley (1881–1969) would follow. J.E.H. MacDonald (1873–1932) was designing patriotic war posters and other materials, and Arthur Lismer (1885–1969), once he moved to Halifax, recorded the camouflaged convoy ships that transported fresh troops to the front lines in Europe.



Tom Thomson, *Burned Over Land*, 1916, oil on wood panel, 21 x 26.7 cm, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario.



A.Y. Jackson, *A Copse, Evening*, 1918, oil on canvas, 86.9 x 112.2 cm, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa.

As Thomson spoke and argued about the war with people he knew in Algonquin Park, some of whom were considered German sympathizers, this preoccupation with the conflict overseas turned his often-melancholy mind toward the portrayal of scenes of destruction, mayhem, and death. He seemed to sense in the destroyed parts of Algonquin what was happening in France and Belgium. Thomson might have been at the front himself, given the bristling hostility and cruelty he depicts in this scene. All told, sixty-six thousand young Canadian men died fighting in the war: nearly everyone in the country had lost a relative or friend or knew someone who had. Thomson was keenly sensitive to this feeling, and he painted it powerfully in this moving, elegiac work.

APPROACHING SNOWSTORM 1915



Tom Thomson, *Approaching Snowstorm*, 1915

Oil on wood, 21.3 x 26.6 cm

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

A few months after Thomson painted this ominous panel, Lawren Harris (1885–1970) and Dr. James MacCallum observed him sketching a similar scene when they accompanied him to Algonquin Park in the early spring of 1916. In *The Story of the Group of Seven*, Harris recounts:

I remember one afternoon in early spring on the shore of one of the Cauchon Lakes in Algonquin Park when a dramatic thunderstorm came up. There was a wild rush of wind across the lake and all nature was tossed into a turmoil. Tom and I were in an abandoned lumber shack. When the storm broke, Tom looked out, grabbed his sketch box, ran out into the gale, squatted behind a big stump and commenced to paint in a fury. He was one with the storm's fury, save that his activity, while keyed to a high pitch, was nonetheless controlled. In twenty minutes, Tom had caught in living paint the power and drama of storm in the north. Here was symbolized, it came to me,



Lawren Harris, *Birch Tree*, c. 1916, oil on illustration board, 26.7 x 35.6 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. This painting by Harris may have been painted in Algonquin Park in the company of Thomson.



TOM THOMSON

Life & Work by David P. Silcox

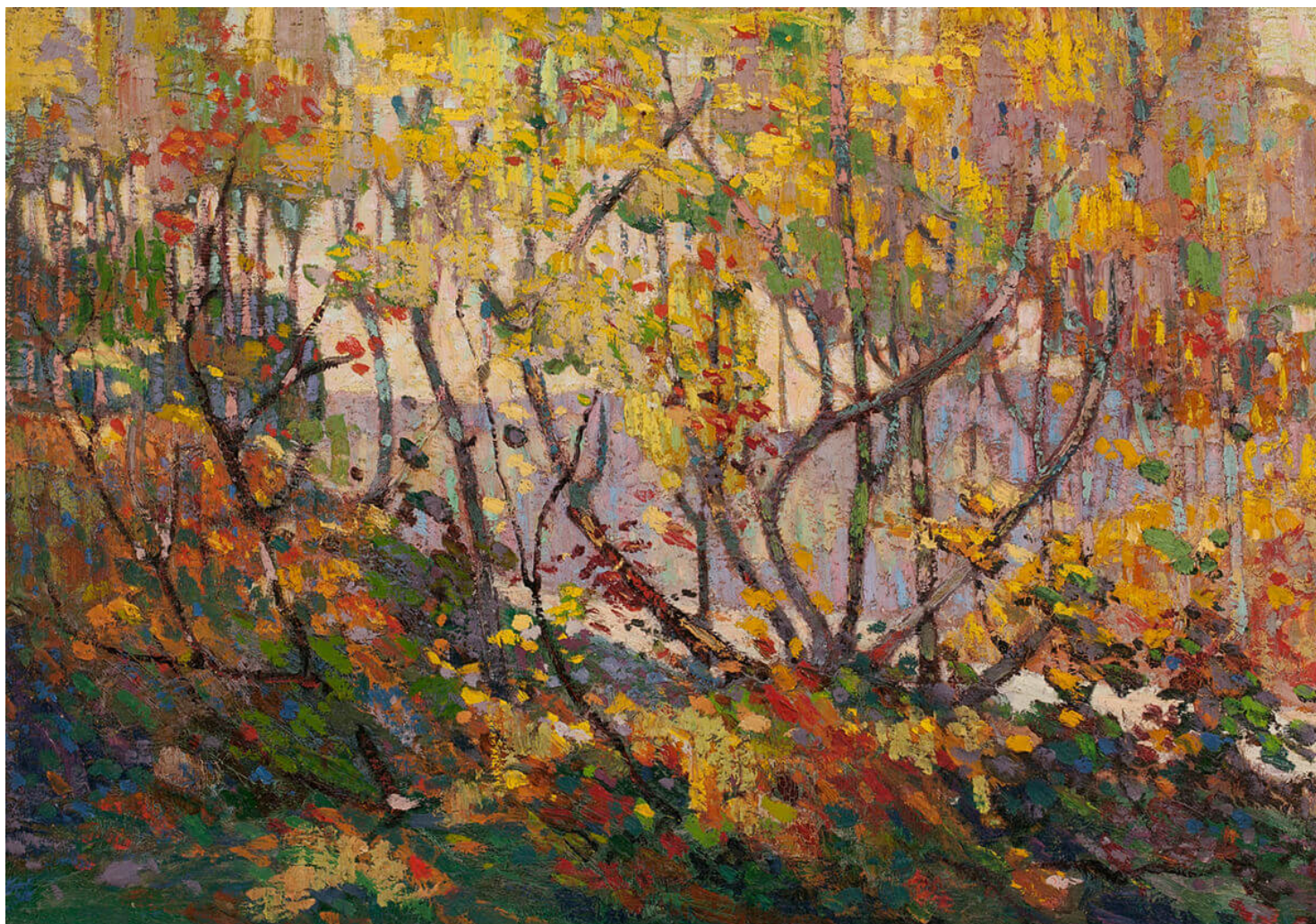
the function of the artist in life: he must accept in deep singleness of purpose the manifestations of life in man and in great nature, and transform these into controlled, ordered and vital expressions of meaning.

This striking description of Thomson at work by someone who supported and tutored him from the moment they met is worth a hundred conjectures from others. Harris personally knew the power of total concentration in the process of creation, and he recognized it in Thomson.

This image, with its lowering, dark cloud, is painting in the moment, an image that is totally action and emotion. It is controlled, but it also shows how out of control nature can be from the human vantage point. The sweeping vertical brush strokes on the left and the black and angry cloud on the right, set against the bright sky, are underscored by the equally ominous black tract of land in which spindly trees are about to be snapped by a force they cannot resist.

In the broad range of Thomson's subjects and treatments, *Approaching Snowstorm* is on one side of the spectrum, just as his nocturnes, sunsets, and floral pictures occupy the other. As Harris recognized, Thomson had reached a point where his hand, mind, and heart were focused on one well-conceived target.

OPULENT OCTOBER 1915–16



Tom Thomson, *Opulent October*, 1915–16

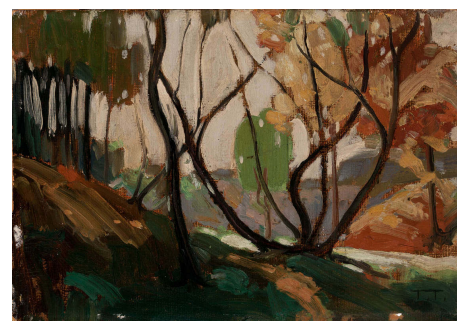
Oil on canvas, 54.0 x 77.3 cm

Private collection, Thornhill, Ontario

Thomson, like all his colleagues, was inspired by autumn—Canada's full dress uniform. His rendition of this season ranged widely, from splotches of Cubist-like forms to galaxies of leaves dancing through a universe of colour, as they are here.

The oil sketch on which *Opulent October* was based provides a surprising contrast to the larger final painting and reveals a major advance in Thomson's development as an artist. In the canvas, Thomson uses only the basic structure of the sketch and recreates all the detail. This transformation of a modest sketch into a canvas entirely different in tone, colour, and light was a breakthrough in method and achievement. Here we see just how prodigious Thomson's abilities had become.

Thomson used a dozen or so of his four hundred or more sketches as models for large canvases, a fact that puts his huge body of small oils into a category entirely different from those done by most members of the Group of Seven. Lawren Harris (1885–1970), A.Y. Jackson (1882–1974), J.E.H. MacDonald (1873–1932), Fred Varley (1881–1969), and Arthur Lismer



Tom Thomson, *Sketch for "Opulent October,"* 1915, oil on wood panel, 17.2 x 24.1 cm, private collection.



TOM THOMSON

Life & Work by David P. Silcox

(1885–1969) all used their sketches as the starting point for large oils.

Thomson did not. He wanted the large canvases to have the same emotional intensity as the small panels, which were painted on-site—an intensity that was almost impossible to summon up in a Toronto studio months later.

With this painting, however, and somewhere within himself, Thomson found the ability to reconceive the subject of a tiny sketch as a vital, living experience in a large format. Once he had made this transition successfully, he had cleared a path toward the two great works that followed close behind: *The West Wind*, 1916–17, and *The Jack Pine*, 1916–17.

NOCTURNE: FOREST SPIRES 1916



Tom Thomson, *Nocturne: Forest Spires*, 1916
Oil on plywood, 21.6 x 26.6 cm
Vancouver Art Gallery

Night was an integral part of Thomson's portrait of Algonquin Park and of the character and soul of Canada portrayed there. For him, the nights in the park were just as seductive as the days, and he painted this subjected repeatedly.

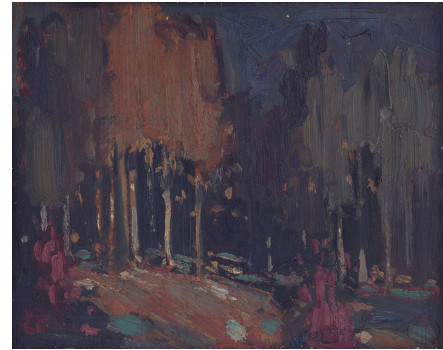
Nocturne: Forest Spires stands out among the artist's depictions of darkness because it catches not only the atmosphere but also the character of the forest at night, mysterious and looming. Here Thomson depicts with accuracy and emotion the feeling of being in the night—a sense of peace, of night like a comforting blanket, wrapping itself around both the subject and the viewer. Thomson's ability to find intensity in a scene was as great in this nocturne as in his wildly colourful autumn tapestries.

Creating nocturne paintings enthralled Thomson in all seasons. On warm summer nights, with a light breeze keeping the mosquitoes down, Thomson liked to float on a lake in his canoe, enveloped by the darkness. In the autumn when the northern lights danced in the sky, he captured their swiftly shifting drama. In the depths of winter, with only the moon for light, the night presented long shadows and eerily illuminated snow. And in the spring, as the earth shucked off the mantle of winter, Thomson painted other night scenes—of lumber camps, trees in leaf, moose grazing at the water's edge, and geese flying north.

Thomson painted at least twenty-three nocturnal paintings—more than all his colleagues in the future Group of Seven put together. He found mystery in the night, when shadows were deep, and the light of the moon and the stars shone across the surface of a lake. They were an essential part of his diary or compilation of phenomena about the North—or, as his patron Dr. James MacCallum called it, his “Encyclopedia of the North.”



Tom Thomson, *Northern Lights*, 1916, oil on plywood, 21.6 x 26.7 cm, Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Thomson painted five versions of the northern lights



Tom Thomson, *Nocturne*, 1914, oil on board, 21.6 x 26.7 cm, Art Gallery of Windsor

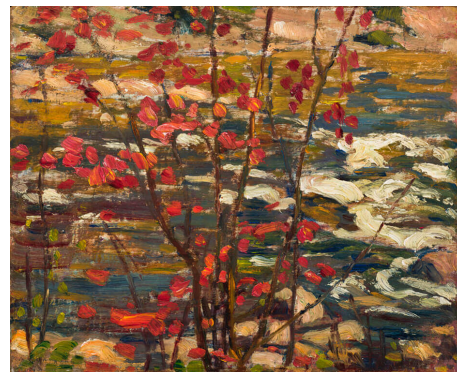
AUTUMN, ALGONQUIN PARK 1916

Tom Thomson, *Autumn, Algonquin Park*, 1916
Oil on panel, 21.6 x 26.7 cm
A.K. Prakash Collection, Toronto

Autumn, Algonquin Park is a fine example of Thomson's new-found style and power during his final twelve months of life and work. The composition is a miracle of simplicity: three broad bands across the width of the panel interrupted, dramatically, by a vertical, scrawny shrimp of a tree with yellow leaves and by two equally skinny, though taller, leafless stems.

What makes this plain and easy arrangement vivid and eye-catching are the two splashes of brilliant red emblazoned in the centre foreground. These scarlet flags against the water's blue (a colour Thomson seldom used in this way) help set the perspective, just as the saplings in front give us something to look around or through to satisfy our curiosity. The dark hills, with the ribbons of ochre and burnt sienna running along the shore, anchor the painting firmly.

After Thomson's death, Lawren Harris (1885–1970) selected this sketch from the stack in the Studio Building and inscribed on the back, "Reserved for MacDonald." It remained in the possession of Thomson's friend and mentor J.E.H. MacDonald (1873–1932) until he died. Group of Seven members A.Y. Jackson (1882–1974), Arthur Lismer (1885–1969), and Fred Varley (1881–1969), together with Harris and MacDonald, all influenced Thomson's thinking and painting. The latter two were especially important to his art: they gave him books of poetry and magazine articles to read and spoke with him about art they had seen, admired, and created.



A.Y. Jackson, *The Red Maple*, 1914, oil on panel, 21.6 x 26.9 cm, McMichael Canadian Art Collection. A.Y. Jackson, a close friend and studio-mate of Thomson, was an influence on Thomson's compositions and use of colour.

FIRST SNOW IN AUTUMN 1916



Tom Thomson, *First Snow in Autumn*, 1916
Oil on panel, 12.8 x 8.2 cm
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Thomson was moved to record the first snow of the winter, probably in late October or early November 1916. He did so in a way that turns these few square centimetres into a maelstrom of pigment that is at once tightly organized yet almost chaotically in motion.

In *First Snow in Autumn*, by omitting any sense of finish or tidiness, Thomson achieves the freedom he had been working toward over the previous three years. Judging by his work during his final year, his all-consuming objective was to express emotion and passion. The issues of scale and artlessness—of making the act of painting look simple and casual—were also stirring in his work. Just a few weeks after he painted this little image he began work on ten large canvases, a daunting ambition.

In this tiny painting, with just three basic colours (white, a mixed blue-grey, and a strange blend of browns that is sometimes greenish and sometimes deep orangey-grey), Thomson creates a radiant gem that is animated throughout. The painting has depth too, the scene is distinct and specific, and his sense of accuracy underlies a painted surface of compulsive, obsessive improvisation.

Close inspection reveals how skillfully it is painted and how, at its core, it is almost an abstract work of art. In its thick application of paint and seemingly reckless brush strokes, the sketch is reminiscent of *Pine Trees at Sunset*, 1915. The order within it, however, foreshadows the “action” paintings of Willem de Kooning (1904–1997), while the freedom with which the paint begins to flow reminds us of the much later and larger canvases of Jackson Pollock (1912–1956).

Painted at about the same time as *First Snow in Autumn*, the oil sketch *Early Snow, Algonquin Park* deals with the phenomenon of winter in quite different ways. It presents a forest scene (with a fallen tree providing a dramatic diagonal element) that is unusual and important because of the way it is painted. Pink light stretches across the snow in the foreground—a daring and unexpected colour made more prominent by the darker screen of trees that set it off. Grey-blue shadows join with the pink in forming a strong band across the foreground. To ensure that viewers accept these “unnatural” colours, Thomson used another odd colour—a flashy turquoise—for the sky.



Tom Thomson, *Early Snow, Algonquin Park*, 1916, oil on canvas mounted on wood panel, 22.2 x 26.7 cm, private collection. Thomson handled the challenge of combining a nocturne and a winter scene with a particular inventiveness in composition and an unorthodox colour palette.

CRANBERRY MARSH 1916



Tom Thomson, *Cranberry Marsh*, 1916
Oil on wood panel, 21.9 x 27 cm
National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

Like many of the oil sketches of 1916, *Cranberry Marsh* demonstrates a shift in Thomson's manner of expression. This change had been emerging for some months and became pronounced after his early spring trip to the Cauchon Lake with Lawren Harris (1885–1970) and Dr. James MacCallum. Thomson's artistic path was not always straight, but any consideration of his four hundred or more varied and energetic sketches as a group invites us to trace certain trends in his oeuvre. The normal landscape conventions begin to fade, his hues become more vibrant, and his compositions, while still recognizable as subjects, become battlefields for layers of close-hued or clashing paint.

Cranberry Marsh, as a subject, is hardly dramatic: a swamp with a low round hill behind it, basking in a hot early-summer sun. Yet Thomson transforms it into a scintillating portrait of bright light and keen perception. The horizontal emphasis is strong and powerful; the gentle mound of the hill, which defines the arc of the sky, and the slight curl of the foreground are the only exceptions.

What really jolts the viewer, however, is the central glowing field of the marsh itself: the bright golden yellows, the tangerine oranges, and the scattered threads of alizarin crimson are like a carpet of sunshine or the hottest coals of a forge. Piercing this broad, flat area are the dazzlingly intense small pools of lapis lazuli with some teal green, a deep contrasting colour that changes the palette of the painting like an abrupt change of tempo in music.

Here Thomson was starting to move away from the subject of the painting and to travel toward abstraction. He was already years ahead of his circle of friends. Harris, Franklin Carmichael (1890–1945), and others close to the Group of Seven approached abstraction years later, when they finally realized that painting could be more than illustration and that the creation of an image might convey an emotional state or an aesthetic sensation. *Cranberry Marsh*, like *After the Storm*, 1917, is a step in the direction of abstraction—a step toward an end that Thomson never got the opportunity to explore.



Photograph of Tom Thomson on Canoe Lake, c. 1915–16. Photography likely by Maud Varley.

THE POINTERS 1916–17



Tom Thomson, *The Pointers*, 1916–17

Oil on canvas, 101 x 114.6 cm

Hart House Permanent Collection, University of Toronto

In this magnificent and sparkling work, Thomson uses a quiverful of techniques drawn from the decades-old European styles of Impressionism, Pointillism, and the Fauves—though it's unlikely he had seen anything more than black and white magazine reproductions of such paintings. There are hints in *The Pointers* of the precision of Georges Seurat (1859–1891), the dabbing strokes of Claude Monet (1840–1926), and the unconventional palette of Henri Matisse (1869–1954). Somehow Thomson made the tools he needed out of an eclectic medley of sources and created something that was distinctly his own: an image of loggers' pointer boats that captures his overarching vision of a scene he knew well.

What is remarkable about *The Pointers* is that the great red autumn hill, except for a few low evergreens, is reflected in both the sky and the water. The paint application is slightly different in each area, but viewers are not confused by the repeating colours. The clouds, in puffy clusters and two sweeping bands, help them instantly to read the painting as intended, just as the loggers' boats make identification of the lake surface easy. Thomson has produced an enclosed space, a northern Eden, where his devices convince viewers to suspend disbelief and accept his idealization of a world they would like to visit or live in.

The Pointers is a studio work, not an on-site sketch. So far as is known, it was not based on a sketch, yet like others of Thomson's large works, it has a stately, formal quality, despite the plushness of the colours. The debt Thomson owed to other strains of historical Western painting traditions has been subsumed here into his own sensibility and all-embracing observation.



Georges Seurat, *Study for "A Sunday on La Grande Jatte,"* 1884, oil on canvas, 70.5 x 104.1 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Seurat knew that, from a distance, the human eye perceives contrasting dots of colour applied in tiny brush strokes as one brilliant hue.

THE WEST WIND 1916-17



Tom Thomson, *The West Wind*, 1916-17
Oil on canvas, 120.7 x 137.9 cm
Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto

Painted in the winter of 1916-17, this lone pine tree demonstrates that Thomson's formation as an artist was both erratic and original. He takes the sinuous forms of Art Nouveau (a decorative style he had used as a commercial artist and in images such as *Northern River*, 1914-15), and the brash and vivid colours of the early Expressionists (especially in the ribbons of red in the foreground, outlining boulder-shaped areas), and uses them to create his own composition. The image, based on a landscape he knew well, contains imaginary elements too.

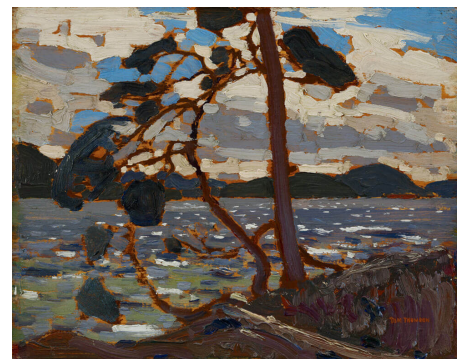
Thomson places the pine tree alone on a point beside a lake. It stands in the middle of the canvas, lopped off at the top—a position that transforms a simple subject into one making a strong and provocative statement. The twisted trunk and branches show age and perseverance, and bravery against the elements.

The painting may also reflect Thomson's state of mind—a kind of mental or metaphorical self-portrait. He may have felt empathy with the tree, for the way it had grown and survived. He painted this canvas while, in Europe, the First World War was raging—a cataclysmic event in which many of his friends were involved. Survival, threatening circumstances, and the possibility of great loss had become paramount issues for everyone around him.

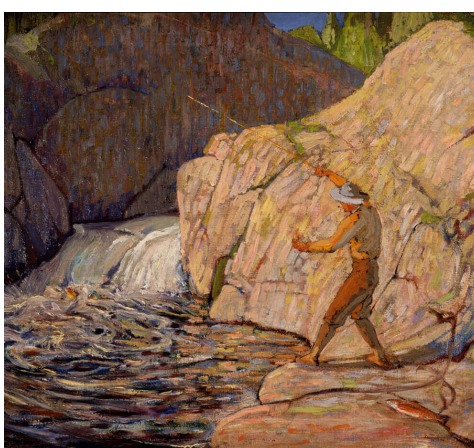
The background of the painting is a complicated invention of animated sky, scudding clouds, and wind-driven whitecaps, which together reinforce the painting's (posthumous) title. Between sky and lake lie the thin wedge of shore and far hills, at once separating yet fusing sky and water with pitch-dark vertical stitches of pigment in Prussian green and blue. What impresses viewers most about this painting is its power and energy. The surging sky and the constant movement on the lake's surface limit the only stillness in the painting: the pine tree itself. Of the entire Canadian canon, this painting is closest in its intensity to the paintings of Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890).

The completed canvas is very different, both as an idea and in its detail, from the sketch Thomson made in the spring of 1916. Whereas most of Thomson's small oil sketches were markedly fresher, stronger, and more intimate than the canvases derived from them, this painting surpasses the sketch with its dynamism. No other canvases by Thomson, with the exceptions of *The Jack Pine*, 1916–17 (sketched and painted in the same time frame as *The West Wind*) and of *Opulent October*, 1915–16 (painted the winter before from a sketch done in the summer of 1915), share this same superb quality.

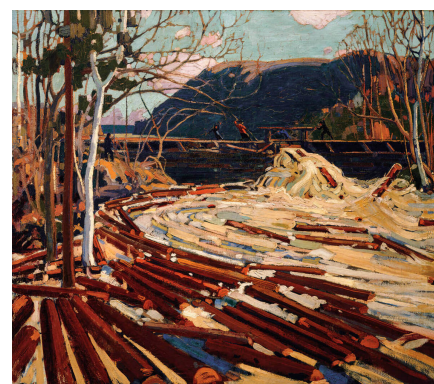
More often the canvases fail to attain the level of intensity and immediacy that an artist experiences when the moment of inspiration strikes and the subject is at hand. The working up of several other canvases done at this time, 1916–17, such as *Woodland Waterfall* (not a successful painting), *The Fisherman*, and *The Drive*, are all examples of paintings with the stagey quality and stiff awkwardness that led Dr. James MacCallum to claim they were unfinished. They have neither the confidence nor the magisterial aplomb of *The West Wind* or *The Jack Pine*.



Tom Thomson, *Oil Sketch for The West Wind*, 1916, oil on wood, 21.4 x 26.8 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Dr. James MacCallum recalled that this sketch was painted at Lake Cauchon in Algonquin Park.



Tom Thomson, *The Fisherman*, 1916–17, oil on canvas, 51.3 x 56.5 cm, Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton.



Tom Thomson, *The Drive*, 1916–17, oil on canvas, 120 x 137.5 cm, MacDonald Stewart Art Centre, Guelph, Ontario.

THE JACK PINE 1916–17



Tom Thomson, *The Jack Pine*, 1916–17

Oil on canvas, 127.9 x 139.8 cm

National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa

The Jack Pine is radically different from the oil sketch on which it is based—even more so than with *The West Wind*, 1916–17—and is perhaps the dominant contender as Thomson's greatest work. Some scholars believe that Thomson did not finish *The West Wind*, and Dr. James MacCallum shared their doubts. There is no similar controversy about *The Jack Pine*.

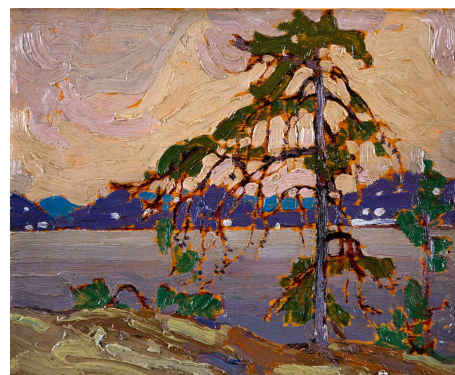
Although Thomson retains the basic shape of the pine in his oil sketch, he makes the foreground considerably brighter in the canvas. The water surface, which in the oil sketch is hastily laid in with a muddy grey and then a yellowish grey against the far shore, is transformed into long slabs of pigment in mauves, blues, and yellows—somewhat in the style of Lawren Harris (1885–1970) and

J.E.H. MacDonald (1873–1932), both of whom excelled in laying down long, unbroken battens of paint one above the other.

This dramatic change is especially evident in the sky. In the sketch, Thomson provides only a rapid swirl of nondescript character, deliberately leaving the wood surface exposed in several places—just as he does in the sketch for *The West Wind*. In the canvas, however, and even more emphatically than for the lake surface, he dresses the sky in wide, horizontal ribbons of paint. With subtle modulations from the yellow-green sunset clouds at the horizon through to the bluish arc that appears at the top of the painting, Thomson creates a perfect backdrop to the pine and its immediate foreground.

The colour of the wood of the small panels has changed since it was milled almost a hundred years ago. When it was new, it was much lighter, possibly even a bright yellowish-white tone if it was of birch. The slow oxidizing over the years has turned the wood into a rich, honey-coloured element in the painting and given it a mellow patina.

What is surprising is the immense variety in the colours Thomson summons up for *The Jack Pine*, an array not seen in the sketch: sumptuous hues, complementing and contrasting light and dark, near and far, minute and grand. Even the softening of the distant shoreline, compared with the harder treatment in *The West Wind*, takes *The Jack Pine* into that vivid yet dusky and indeterminate hour of the day that fascinated another great Canadian painter, J.W. Morrice (1865–1924), and clearly bewitched Thomson too. In the last winter of his short life, Thomson had figured out how to make truly great and durable art.



Tom Thomson, *Sketch for "The Jack Pine,"* 1916, oil on wood, 21 x 26.7 cm, RiverBrink Art Museum, Queenston, Ontario. It seems that Thomson did not particularly want to extrapolate from a small sketch to a large canvas, but in the dozen times he did, he accomplished it with consummate skill by inventing new shapes and colours that suited the basic structure of the initial sketch. The transformation from rough sketch to majestically poised canvas was a feat that took great imagination and intricate skill.

AFTER THE STORM 1917



Tom Thomson, *After the Storm*, 1917
Oil on wood panel, 21.5 x 26 cm
Private collection

This powerful little panel is one of the last, if not the last, of Thomson's paintings. It offers telling indicators that Harold Town (1924-1990) was right in his conviction that Thomson would have developed further had he lived longer: "At the time of his death a perturbed Thomson was poised at the crevasse between figurative and non-figurative art. Whether he would have survived the jump is a matter of conjecture; that he would have jumped is, to me at least, a certainty."¹

Despite the war in Europe, the air was crackling with artistic apprehension, tumultuous change, fear of collapse, and an embrace of the unknown. The first decade of the century had already launched a new order: in physics (Albert Einstein), music (Igor Stravinsky), dance (Vaslav Nijinsky), painting (Pablo Picasso), and sculpture (Constantin Brancusi), to name but a few distinct disruptions. The prospect of abstraction had already infected the zeitgeist of the Western world.

The art market may have been dormant during the war, but the global conflict had invaded artists' minds with brash new ideas, violently reshaping their manner of expression. Canada might have been an outpost in many respects, but Thomson was more in tune with the times than were his colleagues. Lawren Harris (1885–1970), J.E.H. MacDonald (1873–1932), A.Y. Jackson (1882–1974), and Arthur Lismer (1885–1969) were intelligent, curious, and ambitious men, yet they were slow to sense the seismic shift that had occurred in Western art. Thomson was already reacting to it, without yet knowing exactly what it was.

If you magnify *After the Storm* to the point where the scrambled landscape melts into strokes of pigment, you see pure abstraction. Thomson's short, fitful art education meant that he absorbed things quickly, in a haphazard and frenetic way. It is little surprise, then, that he might have been thinking about abstraction a decade or more before Harris finally gave his mind and heart over to it.



Tom Thomson, detail of *After the Storm*, 1917. When viewed up close, Thomson's thick, broad application of paint in this landscape melts into pure abstraction.



SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

Since his death, Tom Thomson has been Canada's best-known and most-loved artist. For successive generations of artists right up to the present, he has set the baseline for Canadian art. His reputation has never wavered—curators, critics, and art historians have all acknowledged his supremacy, whether alone or as an unofficial member of the Group of Seven.

THE GROUP OF SEVEN

Thomson died before the Group of Seven was formed, but his friends and colleagues never doubted that, had he lived, he would have joined them. Lawren Harris (1885–1970) wrote in *The Story of the Group of Seven*:

I have included Tom Thomson as a working member, although the name of the Group did not originate until after his death. Tom Thomson was, nevertheless, as vital to the movement, as much a part of its formation and development, as any other member.¹



Members of the Group of Seven at the Arts and Letters Club in Toronto in 1920. Clockwise from left: Fred Varley, A.Y. Jackson, Lawren Harris, Barker Fairley (not a member of the group), Franz Johnston, Arthur Lismer, and J.E.H. Macdonald. Franklin Carmichael, a founding member of the group, is not present.

The Group of Seven formally came together in March 1920 when Harris invited five artists to his home at 63 Queen's Park (now the site of the Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies at St. Michael's College, University of Toronto): Franklin Carmichael (1890–1945), and Frank Johnston (1888–1949), Arthur Lismer (1885–1969), J.E.H. MacDonald (1873–1932), and Fred Varley (1881–1969). A.Y. Jackson (1882–1974) would have been present but was on a painting trip in Georgian Bay.

The purpose of the meeting was to deal with unfinished business. Seven years earlier, in January 1913, Harris and MacDonald had travelled to the Albright Art Gallery (now the Albright-Knox Art Gallery) in Buffalo, New York, to see the *Exhibition of Contemporary Scandinavian Art*. They returned to Toronto brimming with an almost evangelical fervour to paint Canada's northern wilderness as the artists whose work they had just seen had done of their homeland. Everyone in their group was won over by this enthusiasm, including Thomson.



Gustav Fjæstad, *Vintermånsken (Winter Moonlight)*, 1895, oil on canvas, 100 x 134 cm, Nationalmuseum, Stockholm. The resemblance between some of the paintings in the *Exhibition of Contemporary Scandinavian Art* and later works by members of the Group of Seven is quite remarkable.



Harald Sohlberg, *Vinternatt i fjellene (Winter Night in the Mountains)*, 1901, oil on canvas, 70 x 92 cm, private collection. This painting and *Winter Moonlight* (left) were illustrated in black and white in the catalogue for the *Exhibition of Contemporary Scandinavian Art* that J.E.H. MacDonald purchased when he and Lawren Harris visited the exhibition in 1913.

In addition, these artists (especially Harris and MacDonald) were strongly influenced by the drive in the United States, led by the poets Henry David Thoreau and Walt Whitman, to find spirituality in nature and to create a North American cultural movement separate from its European roots. In those same years, artists such as Robert Henri (1865–1929) were promoting a continental approach to landscape painting. Just as the future members of the Group of Seven were forming their ideas, they found themselves supported by a North American zeitgeist that was either rejecting European influences or insisting on a made-at-home style of expression.

In paintings such as *Early Snow*, 1915–16, Thomson had fulfilled the dreams of Harris, MacDonald, and their colleagues by helping them chart a path toward their goal of a Canadian national school of art. After Thomson's sudden death in 1917, they mounted memorial exhibitions in his honour, first at the Arts Club in Montreal in March 1919, then at the Art Association of Montreal (now the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts), in Ottawa at the National Gallery of Canada, and, in February 1920, at the Art Gallery of Toronto (now the Art Gallery of Ontario). A week or two later, these men met together to form the Group of Seven.



Tom Thomson, *Early Snow*, 1916-17, oil on canvas, 45.4 x 45.5 cm, Winnipeg Art Gallery.

Given his drift toward abstraction in works such as *After the Storm*, 1917, Thomson may not have continued to paint representative landscape scenes in the manner set out by the Group of Seven before and through the 1920s. As these men went on to dominate the Canadian art scene until the 1950s, in large part because of their own smart self-promotion and the nation's sentimental longing for tradition in the wake of the two world wars, they intentionally looked away from such European influences as the *Der Blaue Reiter*, Cubism, the Fauves, Surrealism, Suprematism, Futurism, and Orphism. Had Thomson lived longer, these movements may have come to interest him.

Harold Town (1924–1990) suggests that the Group of Seven intentionally and intuitively ignored what was happening in the world of art elsewhere by looking inward instead of outward. In doing so these artists established a starting point and a vocabulary for a national school that endured. In Town's words, "It was an implosion, not an explosion. And by looking inward it gave us an outward identity."²



A.Y. Jackson, *Terre Sauvage*, 1913, oil on canvas, 128.8 x 154.4 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. This canvas was a high point in Jackson's work before he enlisted in the army and left for France. His creative power was never again as strong or as original.



Lawren Harris, *Above Lake Superior*, c. 1922, oil on canvas, 121.9 x 152.4 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Harris's austere and chiselled approach to landscape painting was not Thomson's way. However, Harris encouraged Thomson to find his own poetic form of expression.

THE ARTIST AND NATURE

In his boyhood and in his last four years, Thomson lived close to nature.³ As a youth, he learned from his elderly relative, Dr. William Brodie, a well-known naturalist who worked in the biology department of what is now the Royal Ontario Museum, how to observe nature closely and appreciate its mystery. From 1913 on he moved to Algonquin Park as early as he could in the spring and stayed there until late in the fall. As a result, he painted the park in all seasons, weathers, and times of day.

By today's standards, Thomson was not an environmentalist. Along with his friends in the future Group of Seven, he accepted logging in the forests, commercial fishing, mining, and the expansion of agriculture as essential to the growth of the Canadian economy. They all thought it inconceivable that Canada's natural resources would ever be depleted, though they would no doubt be appalled by contemporary clear-cutting. In *Timber Chute* and *Crib and Rapids*, 1915, and *Sandbank with Logs*, 1916, Thomson painted scenes of logging and dams as part of the world around him. When fires swept through Algonquin Park, however, he was moved to record their fierce destruction in emotion-laden sketches such as *Fire-Swept Hills*, 1915, and *Burned Over Land*, 1916.

The Group of Seven, both before and after the First World War, was determined to present Canadians with a land that was pristine and inexhaustible—a wilderness Eden of the North. As a consequence, Thomson



Tom Thomson, *Sandbank with Logs*, 1916, oil on composite wood-pulp board, 21.3 x 26.3 cm, Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Although muted in colour, this painting is notable for its fine drawing of the logs.

and his friends have been considered naturalists as well as spiritualists, sympathetic to the environment they portrayed with a boldness and vivid coarseness never achieved by previous artists. Thomson's brash sketch *Autumn Foliage*, 1915, exemplifies these qualities well.

In recent years, however, a number of revisionist art historians have criticized Thomson and the Group of Seven for the status they claimed as originators of a new style of nationalist art.⁴ These men rejected Old World art styles, they say, yet the conventions they followed were European in origin. They travelled to the "unpopulated wilderness" to sketch, yet they ignored the lumbermen, miners, railway men, and vacationers who were already there, and especially the Aboriginal groups that had occupied these territories long before Europeans settled in the area.



Tom Thomson, *Autumn Foliage*, 1915, oil on wood panel, 21.6 x 26.8 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

Even Thomson's vaunted skills as a canoeist and bushman have been exaggerated, particularly by his artist colleagues and admirers after his death. He was competent, but he certainly did not, as Frederick Housser wrote, "know the woods as the red Indian knew them before him."⁵

CANVASES VERSUS OIL SKETCHES

Throughout his career, Thomson produced four hundred or more small oil paintings on wood panels, canvas board, plywood, and cigar-box lids—in the way *plein air* artists sketching outdoors tend to do. These works were spontaneous, quickly executed sketches. They became, for him, like drawings—the most immediate and intimate expression of an idea, a thought, an emotion, or a sensation. They were based on his observations of a host of phenomena—sunsets, thunderstorms, and the northern lights—in Algonquin Park and around Georgian Bay.

These “drawings in paint” have long been considered the core of Thomson’s work, given their general high quality. Most of them were not done as studies for larger canvases but as complete works in themselves. Thomson was satisfied with these small gems because he realized, as did his mentors J.E.H. MacDonald (1873–1932) and Lawren Harris (1885–1970), that they would not translate to a large canvas without losing the intimacy that characterizes them profoundly. Only a dozen or so, including *The Jack Pine*, 1916–17, and *The West Wind*, 1916–17, were ever realized as large canvases. Indeed, Thomson’s production of canvases was small: less than fifty in all, including awkward early works that are hardly part of the Thomson canon, such as *Moose Crossing a River*, 1911–12, and *Northern Shore*, 1912–13, which imitates a black and white reproduction Thomson found in *The Studio* magazine of *Landscape*, date unknown, by American artist Harry van der Weyden (1864–1952).⁶



Harry van der Weyden, *Landscape*, n.d., reproduced on page 350 of *The Studio*, vol. 31, 1904.



Tom Thomson, *Northern Shore*, 1912–13, oil on canvas, 69.2 x 86.1 cm, Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston.

At one point Thomson said he wanted to produce an oil sketch a day—a kind of visual diary of Algonquin Park’s changing scenes, shifting with the weather and the seasons. They form an extensive suite of paintings with a constant theme: consistent in style and with a palette of strikingly original colours, the sketches were created with a specific intent and executed in a compressed time frame.

The Haystack paintings by Claude Monet (1840–1926) or the large cut-paper collages by Henri Matisse (1869–1954) serve similar ends. In Canadian art, the exquisite colour drypoints by David Milne (1881–1953) provide a coherent, related body of work. In literature, a body of related works might be a suite of poems, such as Shakespeare’s 154 sonnets linked by their theme of heartache, longing, and uncertainty, or Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, 44 sonnets written for her husband, Robert. Thomson’s small panels are, indeed, like love sonnets to the landscape of Algonquin Park and the idea of the North.



Tom Thomson, *Blue Lake: Sketch for "In the Northland,"* 1915, oil on wood, 21.7 x 26.9 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Unlike his friends in the future Group of Seven, Thomson seldom enlarged his small sketches into large canvases. In this instance he did, following the sketch fairly closely for the painting.

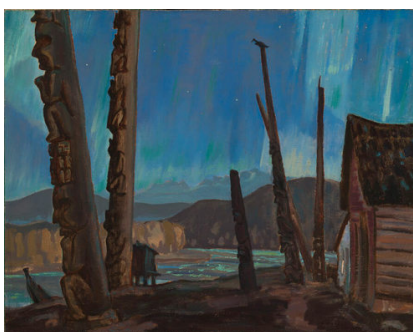


Tom Thomson, *In the Northland*, 1915-16, oil on canvas, 101.7 x 114.5 cm, Montreal Museum of Fine Arts. The painting's composition closely follows the sketch Thomson made earlier in the year.

THE CANADIAN DOCUMENTARY TRADITION

The documentary tradition has always been strong in Canada. It arrived with the British military in the mid-eighteenth century as it recorded Canadian topography in drawings, watercolours, and oils. Later visitors and settlers such as Paul Kane (1810-1871) travelled west, eager to paint Aboriginal peoples before, as everyone expected at the time, they disappeared entirely.

This documentary mindset was strong during Thomson's time, and the Group of Seven wanted to show Canadians what their vast land truly looked like. Emily Carr (1871-1945) too was determined to record the First Nations villages, totem poles, and war canoes along the northwest coast and up the Skeena River before they vanished. European settlers who witnessed the precipitous decline in the Aboriginal populations—close to 90 per cent in places like Haida Gwaii (formerly the Queen Charlotte Islands)—had a compelling reason to believe that a visual record would shortly be the only way to know what had once existed there.



LEFT: A.Y. Jackson, *Night on the Skeena River*, 1926, oil on canvas, 63.5 x 81.3 cm, private collection. Jackson painted the totem poles exactly as he saw them, tilting in different directions and decorated in muted, earthy colours. He was accompanied on this trip in British Columbia by artist Edwin Holgate and anthropologist Marius Barbeau.



RIGHT: Paul Kane, *Indian Encampment on Lake Huron*, c. 1845, oil on canvas, 48.3 x 73.7 cm, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Kane recorded details of the wigwams in his journal, explaining how the birch-bark strips were sewn together with roots and wrapped around eight or ten poles tied together at the top.

In a similar vein, A.Y. Jackson (1882-1974) painted the quaint villages along the St. Lawrence River and, in 1926, the Indian villages and totems along the Skeena River because he thought they would soon be gone, as in *Night on the Skeena River*. Even Marius Barbeau, the leading Canadian anthropologist of the day, believed that the extinction of the Aboriginal peoples across the continent was imminent.



Tom Thomson, *Hot Summer Moonlight*, 1915, oil on wood, 21.4 x 26.7 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. Thomson probably painted this scene as he sat in his canoe on the water. He depicted the huge sky and the moonlit water surrounding the low, rounded hills dramatically in short, quick brushstrokes of blue, green, purple, brown, and yellow paint.

Thomson didn't abandon his urge to document as he developed what his patron Dr. James MacCallum called his "Encyclopedia of the North." In *Hot Summer Moonlight*, 1915, he captured a common lake scene in Algonquin Park, though as a nocturne, not, as most artists preferred, by day. The sermon the future members of the Group of Seven wanted to preach to their fellow Canadians relied on representation. As David Milne (1881-1953), writing to Harry McCurry of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, in April 1932, expressed it, "Tom Thomson isn't popular for what aesthetic qualities he showed, but because his work is close enough to representation to get by with the average man."⁷

Judging by his sketches from the spring and summer of 1917, Thomson may have begun to realize there was a limit to the challenges and the rewards of Algonquin Park as a subject. If he was to respond honestly to his deepening sense of art's power and of being an artist in touch with his times, he must have had intimations that he could not go on in that manner forever: he would have to acknowledge the Expressionist tendency toward abstraction and gestural painting that was already evident in his work, as revealed in one of his last sketches, *After the Storm*, 1917.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Thomson lived in the midst of the momentous transitions from art to photography, and on the cusp of the shift from representation to abstraction in painting. We know of his interest in photography because he lamented the loss of many rolls of exposed film when his canoe capsized twice on the Spanish River in 1912. The few photographs we have from him are ordinary snapshots, not aesthetic statements. His paintings, in contrast, quickly sweep past mere illustration and into strong emotional expression. Painters like Thomson don't necessarily paint what they see: they paint how they want us to see and to feel.



Tom Thomson, *Canoeing through Drowned Land, I*, c. 1912, photograph, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.



Tom Thomson, *Beaver Lodge, I*, c. 1914, photograph, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

In all the literature about the Toronto painters Thomson knew, there is no mention of any of them using cameras as an aid to memory. Rather, they all used small wooden panels to paint on-the-spot oil sketches of the landscape, and later developed larger canvases from some of them. The uncanny precision of *Drowned Land*, 1912, and a few other paintings, however, raises the question of whether Thomson did on occasion refer to a photograph he had taken. Even after his niece discovered, in 1967, a cache of forty of his photos, the question of this possibility is still not clearly answered.⁸ As things stand, not one of Thomson's known photos relates to any of his paintings.



TOM THOMSON

Life & Work by David P. Silcox

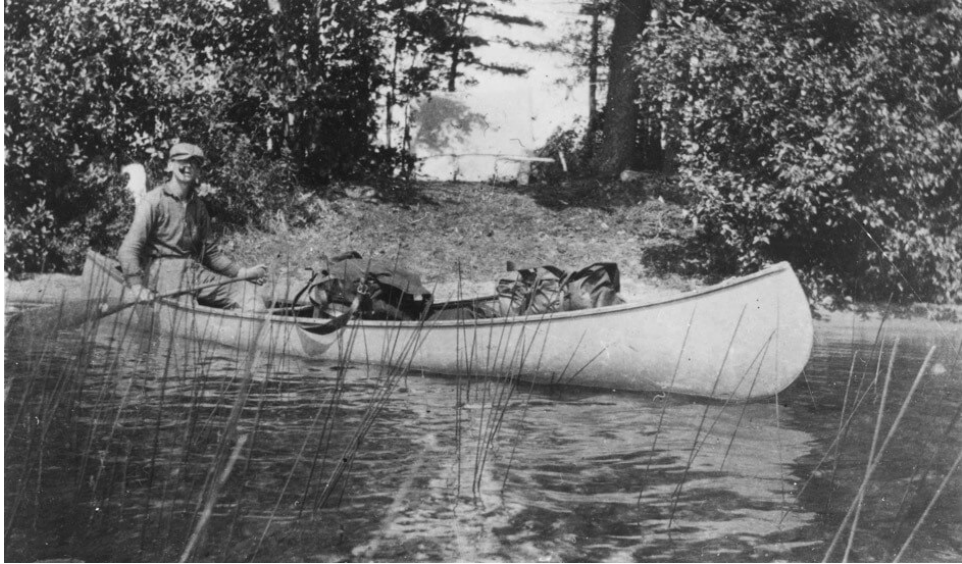


Tom Thomson, *A Lake in Southern Ontario, III*, c. 1911, photograph, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa.

THOMSON'S DEATH: MYSTERY OR MYTH?

Thomson's death by drowning on July 8, 1917, was a shock to everyone who knew him and to many who had only heard of him. The tragic nature of his death erased any thought of the irony of this solitary loss thousands of miles from the battlefields of France and Belgium, where sixty-six thousand young Canadian men died in the First World War.

Thomson's death was entirely unexpected. The weather that day was pleasant, and by 1917 Thomson had become a proficient canoeist who knew enough to handle himself safely. Despite his periods of doubt and melancholy, he was at the pinnacle of his career. He must have been uncertain at times because of his meteoric rise as an artist in just over four years, but there was no indication that he ever considered suicide. Nothing about the condition of his body suggested that he had taken his own life.



Tom Thomson in a canoe he painted dove grey, 1912.

On the morning of July 8, Thomson was seen walking with Shannon Fraser, the owner of Mowat Lodge, and later heading off across Canoe Lake in his canoe. There were no reports of anyone following him, so the rumours of murder always seem to focus on the night before he was last seen. At the time no one mentioned the possibility of his having been in a fight that night or of the cut on his forehead causing his death.

The simplest explanation is therefore likely the correct one—that Thomson stood up in his canoe, lost his balance, and fell. He hit his forehead on the gunwale in the process, knocked himself out, and slipped into the water, where he drowned—as the coroner's report confirmed. However, Roy MacGregor in his 2010 book *Northern Light: The Enduring Mystery of Tom Thomson and the Woman Who Loved Him* notes that he has uncovered additional information, including forensic evidence based on the skull found in what he considers Thomson's grave overlooking Canoe Lake, that suggests Thomson may have been murdered. His research will need to be considered by any of Thomson's future biographers.



Peter Doig, *White Canoe*, 1990-91, oil on canvas, 200.5 x 243 cm, private collection. Doig used a source photo of Thomson sketching in his canoe for this painting.

Regardless, what remains is not a mystery but a rich legacy, full of abiding meaning and satisfying pleasure for everyone who looks at the paintings. They, rather than vacuous speculation about the manner of his death, are the objects

Thomson would want viewers to study and enjoy. Of all the recent representations of Thomson in words and in art, perhaps the canvases *Swamped*, 1990, and *White Canoe*, 1990-91, by the renowned painter Peter Doig (b. 1959), best capture the myth and the mystery. Here Doig, who spent his childhood and youth in Canada, alludes to the iconic 1914 photograph of Thomson sketching from his canoe, except that, in his images, the ghostly white canoe is empty.

ENDURING POPULARITY

Artists of every stripe and persuasion, whether landscape painters or not, have acknowledged that Thomson gave Canada a galvanizing set of icons that largely define the Canadian visual identity, as many people like to think of it. Poets have written about his work; playwrights have dramatized his life; films, both documentary and fictional, have presented his achievements; musicians—classical and popular—have composed songs with references to him; and one of the plays about him, *Colours in the Storm*, has come back to life as a musical. In 2013, when Kim Dorland (b. 1974) became the first artist-in-residence at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, he responded directly to some of Thomson's paintings in his works. In the exhibition *You Are Here: Kim Dorland and the Return to Painting*, the images by the two artists were shown side by side.

Sherrill Grace, a respected scholar, writes in *Inventing Tom Thomson* that Thomson is a "haunting presence" for Canadian artists. For creators in all disciplines, she says, he "embodies the Canadian artistic identity."⁹

In addition to the world of contemporary visual art, Thomson has made an impression on popular culture. The rock group The Tragically Hip refers to Thomson in their song "Three Pistols." The film *The Far Shore*, by artist Joyce Wieland (1930-1998), was her panegyric to Thomson and a statement of her parallel love for Canada's wilderness. Poets, including Robert Kroetsch, Henry Beissel, George Whipple, Kevin Irie, and Arthur Bourinot, have written lamentations about him.

The most recent grand tribute to Thomson and his work is the spectacular 2011 film *West Wind: The Vision of Tom Thomson*, directed by Michèle Hozer and produced by Peter Raymont.



Kim Dorland, *Portrait of Tom Thomson*, 2013, oil and acrylic on wood panel, 50 x 40 cm, collection of the artist.



Publicity still from Joyce Wieland's *The Far Shore*, 1977. In this scene the character Tom McLeod paints a landscape reminiscent of Tom Thomson's work.

THOMSON AND THE ART MARKET

Although Thomson sold relatively few paintings during his lifetime, the prices were more than satisfactory for someone with low expectations: \$500 for *Northern River*, 1914-15, was a handsome sum at that time. He was happy to get \$20 for a small panel, though more commonly he gave them away as gifts to friends who admired them. Even for a bachelor, Thomson made but a meagre living. When he died, he left a dozen or so canvases and a large stack of oil sketches unsold.

After Thomson's death, Dr. James MacCallum despaired of selling even this modest number of works, given the frugal appetites of Canada's collectors for contemporary work. Yet, within a few years, MacCallum, Lawren Harris (1885-1970), J.E.H. MacDonald (1873-1932), and A.Y. Jackson (1882-1974) sold off a sizable number of the canvases and sketches stored in the Studio Building in Toronto. Around 1922 Jackson estimated that, of the 145 sketches there, some twenty-five were worth perhaps \$50 each, fifty were worth \$40 each, and for the other seventy, \$20 each would be a good price. Harris advised his friends the Laidlaw brothers to add Thomson to their collections, and soon after he told MacCallum that they had purchased twenty sketches for a total of \$1,000.



Tom Thomson, *Autumn Clouds*, 1915, oil on wood panel, 21.8 x 26.9 cm, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. Lawren Harris persuaded wealthy businessman Robert Laidlaw to purchase this painting after Thomson's death.

All told, Thomson's prices doubled in the five years after he died—and they have doubled every few years thereafter. In 1943 MacCallum donated his huge holding of Thomson's works, eighty-five in all, to the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, to which he had, in 1918, sold twenty-nine oil sketches.

Because Thomson's canvases nearly all found their way into public collections soon after his death, and there were so few in any case, the market in his work has mostly been the sketches. The highest price for a Thomson sketch, *Early Spring, Canoe Lake*, 1917, is \$2,749,500, achieved by Heffel auction house on November 26, 2009. A canvas, were a good one to become available, would likely eclipse Paul Kane's record of \$5.1 million for a Canadian painting. But today only four or five canvases remain in private hands.



Tom Thomson, *Early Spring, Canoe Lake*, 1917, oil on panel, 21.6 x 26.7 cm, private collection. This painting holds the record for the highest price paid at auction for a work by Tom Thomson.



STYLE & TECHNIQUE

Once he caught fire as an artist, Tom Thomson created new and startling colours; primed his canvases and sketching panels with an eye to his planned compositions; used ideas and motifs from other art movements that appealed to him; and grappled with subjects in original and durable ways.

DIVERSE INFLUENCES

In the early 1900s in Toronto, Thomson had no opportunities to see first-hand what was going on in Europe or even in New York—a city he never visited. The art he was exposed to came in the form of reproductions in *The Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art* and other art magazines, or was filtered through the interpretations of art movements by his colleagues, the future members of the Group of Seven, all of whom were trained in art and art history.

Consequently, what we find in Thomson's work are smatterings of many earlier art movements: Impressionism, Expressionism, Art Nouveau, Arts and Crafts motifs, stray examples of American versions of French Impressionism, and Victorian and Edwardian English landscape traditions. *The Pointers*, 1916–17, shows Thomson flirting with Impressionism, for example, while *The West Wind*, 1916–17—especially the foreground and the sinuous branches of the tree—draws on Art Nouveau. Thomson's nod to Expressionism crops up most strongly in 1916 and 1917 as he moves toward abstraction in such works as *After the Storm*, 1917 and *Cranberry Marsh*, 1916.

Any art books or magazines that floated into Thomson's view would have had mostly black and white images. From the various influences he eagerly absorbed, he received a wealth of possibilities, none of which, however, reflected the vital modernist movements (Cubism, the Fauves, Surrealism) that had been roiling through Europe during the two decades before his death in 1917.

In works such as *Approaching Snowstorm*, 1915, Thomson was drawn to the English landscape painter John Constable (1776–1837), who had been introduced to him by Arthur Lismer (1885–1969) and J.E.H. MacDonald (1873–1932). Constable was the first artist to approach the landscape not just as a painting genre but as an experience of a natural event—a rainstorm, a brilliant rainbow, an unusual cloud formation, a misty sunrise. In this respect, he and his contemporary William J.M. Turner (1775–1851) rewrote the rules for landscape painting. In 1888 a critic described Constable's small oil sketches as "faithful and brilliant transcriptions of the thing of the moment—nature caught in the very act."¹ He might have been writing of Thomson's small sketches almost three decades later.



Tom Thomson, *Study of a Woman's Head*, c. 1903, ink and crayon on paper, 11 x 8 cm, Tom Thomson Memorial Art Gallery, Owen Sound, Ontario. Thomson's carefully drawn sketch is based on the iconic "Gibson Girl," created by the American illustrator Charles Dana Gibson and often reproduced in magazines in the early 1900s.



Works by the English painter John Constable, such as *Stoke-by-Nayland*, c. 1810–11, oil on canvas, 28.3 x 36.2 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, seem to have influenced Thomson as he developed as an artist.



Tom Thomson, *Poplars by a Lake*, 1916, oil on grey wood-pulp board, 21.5 x 26.8 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. This work reveals the influence of Constable.

Closer to home, however, MacDonald was the senior artist of the coterie, and his influence on Thomson was perhaps most critical of all. His own fascination with storms, cloud formations, and the effects of nature are similar in their feeling to Thomson's, and his bravado in colour choices was daring and original too—as in *The Tangled Garden*, 1916, which caused a real rumpus with critics. Lawren Harris (1885–1970) was probably next in importance for Thomson: his example can be seen in *The Jack Pine*, 1916–17, with its simple and dramatic composition and thick, long slabs of pigment.

Thomson had the gumption and good sense to seize and ingest whatever he needed from these multiple sources and to adapt them to the landscape he knew best. This instinctive impulse made his work ring true and imbued it with power. It also helped him to make art that, while complicated, sophisticated, and original, was also accessible. His work remains fresh for each generation.



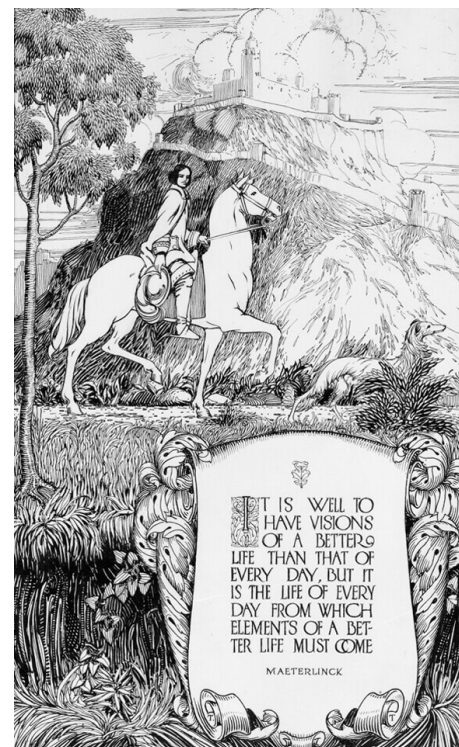
J.E.H. Macdonald, *The Tangled Garden*, 1916, oil on beaverboard, 121.4 x 152.4 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

COMMERCIAL ART

Alone among his friends in the future Group of Seven, Thomson had not enjoyed a good art-school education. However, except for Lawren Harris (1885–1970) and A.Y. Jackson (1882–1974), they all worked as commercial artists. With his training and experience in advertising, commercial design, and printing, Thomson had a strong background in illustration before he began to paint seriously.²

Thomson spent most of his adult life, 1902–13, working for design and photo-engraving firms, first in Seattle and then in Toronto. Grip Limited, where he was employed for three formative years, 1909–12, was the leading graphic design company in the city. It introduced the Art Nouveau style to Canada, along with metal engraving and the four-colour process.³ Yet, in all his years as a commercial designer, Thomson was never able to draw the human figure successfully. Unlike his colleagues Arthur Lismer (1885–1969) and Fred Varley (1881–1969), whose art-school training prepared them to be “figure men” at Grip, Thomson’s lack of skill in this area stayed with him all his life. His few paintings that include figures (*In the Sugar Bush*, 1915, *Larry Dixon Splitting Wood*, 1915, *Figure of a Lady*, 1915, and *The Fisherman*, 1916–17) are among the most awkward, wooden, and expressionless of his entire production. Only in his last four years was Thomson able to devote himself entirely to making art, after Dr. James MacCallum’s support in 1914 launched him into a career of painting full time.

Thomson’s debt to commercial art surfaced occasionally in his work: in the decorative Art Nouveau style he used in some of his paintings, such as *Northern River*, 1914–15, and *The West Wind*, 1916–17, and in compositions such as *Decorative Landscape: Birches* and *Spring Ice*, both 1915–16, where he places a grouping of trees in the foreground to frame a view across a lake of low hills in the background—a layout he had used earlier in his design work. As Jackson put it, “We treated our subjects with the freedom of designers. We tried to emphasize colour, line and pattern.”⁴ In *Forest Undergrowth I, II, and III*, the panels Thomson painted over the winter of 1915–16 for MacCallum’s cottage on Georgian Bay, this decorative influence becomes overwhelming and unoriginal.



Tom Thomson, *Decorative Landscape: Quotation from Maurice Maeterlinck*, c. 1908, ink on paper, 32.6 x 19.5 cm. In the art cards Thomson created as a graphic designer, such as this that shows the influence of Art Nouveau, he often combined illustration with calligraphy, using verses by Robert Burns, Rudyard Kipling, and Maurice Maeterlinck.



LEFT: Tom Thomson, *Decorative Panel (II)*, 1915–16, oil on beaverboard, 120.8 x 96.4 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

RIGHT: Tom Thomson, *Decorative Landscape: Birches*, 1915–16, oil on canvas, 77.1 x 72.1 cm, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

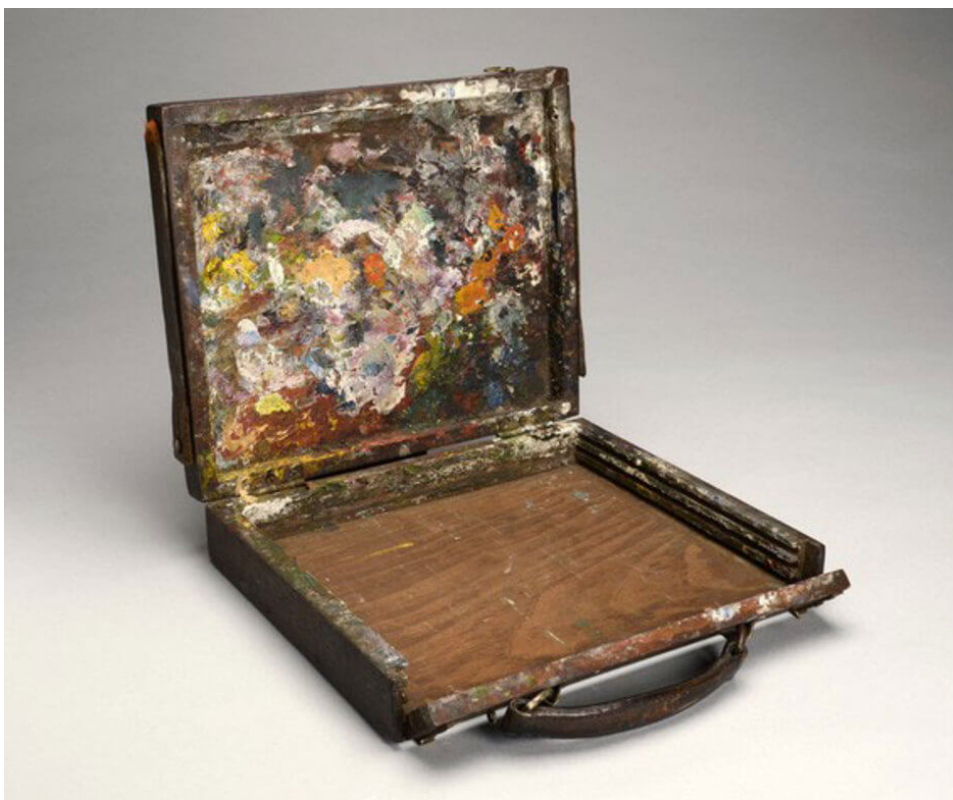
AN IDIOSYNCRATIC PALETTE

As Thomson learned the basics, he quickly began to experiment. He tried different kinds of pigments, such as Freeman's white lead, a pure-white composite that his colleagues hardly used at all. He experimented with the composition or structure of each painting—and rarely repeated a pattern.

More striking was his idiosyncratic palette, his manner of mixing available pigments to make unusual new colours, as in *Pine Trees at Sunset*, 1915, with its radiant acid-green and yellow sunset, and *Cranberry Marsh*, 1916, where its field of brilliant light resembles burning sunshine. His patron Dr. James MacCallum thought him "the greatest colourist of the Algonquin School" (as Thomson and his artist friends were initially referred to).

Even more surprising is how Thomson makes unreal colours stand in for what was actually there: a bluish-pink to represent snow in *Early Snow, Algonquin Park*, 1916, a deep teal-lapis lazuli-greenish-blue for a patch of swamp water in *Cranberry Marsh*, a yellowish-green arc in the sky above a violent red sunset in *Sunset*, 1915. Thomson's control of colour is exceptional, a mark of his growing success and confidence. Moreover, his colours and his brushwork are instantly recognizable and as personal as a fingerprint, regardless of the subject or the season he tackles.

In the majority of his sketches, Thomson uses fairly short, energetic, and abrupt strokes, with a few gentle arcs added as final touches. The direction of his brush is expressive: in *The Pointers*, 1916–17, the strokes are mostly horizontal in the water and the sky, but vertical on the hills. By the last year of his life, however, Thomson was punching his colours onto his panels in all directions with a vigorous brush, as in his sketch *After the Storm*, 1917. This aggressive but intense kind of painting is indicative of Thomson's transition from illustration or representation to a form of expression that was starting to border on Abstract Expressionism. But, like David Milne (1881–1953), Emily Carr (1871–1945), and others of his generation, Thomson didn't advance far enough to relinquish representation entirely, even though he was moving in that direction.



Tom Thomson's sketch box, Study Collection, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

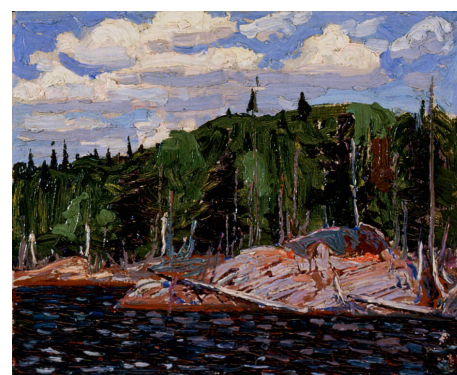


Tom Thomson, *Tea Lake Dam*, 1917, oil on wood panel, 21.3 x 26.2 cm, McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. With effective brushstrokes, Thomson captures the buildup of storm clouds above as the waters of the Muskoka River flow over the chute in the spring.

SURFACE PREPARATION

Thomson experimented almost casually with different surfaces or supports for his paintings. He used wood panels most often, but also canvas-covered boards, commercial pressed-paper boards, illustration card, cigar-box lids, and even plywood, which, sadly, deteriorates over time into the separate layers of composite veneer from which it is made. As far as is known, he never used Masonite, a later favourite for many artists.

In the lead-up to the major travelling retrospective, *Tom Thomson*, organized by the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, and the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, in 2002-3, the Canadian Conservation Institute undertook a major analysis of Thomson's paintings using infrared and X-ray photography, spectrometry, and micro-sampling of pigments. In their catalogue essay about what was learned through this intensive work, Sandra Webster-Cook and Anne Ruggles describe how Thomson applied primers in different colours to different parts of his compositions in order to give subtle but important qualities to his paintings.⁵



Tom Thomson, *Lakeside, Spring*, Algonquin Park, 1915, oil on composite wood-pulp board, 21.7 x 26.9 cm, private collection.

Most painters prime a canvas with a coat of lead white, gesso, or some mixture of a neutral pigment and animal glue (rabbit was a favourite in Thomson's day and, in some circles, still is). This "foundation" adheres to the canvas or board, holds the pigments to the surface, and acts as a buffer that keeps the pigments of the painting from being partly absorbed, altered, or leached over time by chemicals in the canvas or panel. This detailed information on Thomson's methods and materials has greatly advanced the ability of scientific analysis to detect Thomson forgeries, of which a goodly number exist.

Early on in his painting career, Thomson realized that oil paintings, large or small, are made in a reverse fashion. The first colours to be applied are often buried below subsequent layers of paint, while the last colours to go on become the surface of the finished work and are the first colours we see. The underlying pigments, though, give subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) qualities to those above them. Thomson sometimes used more than one primer in his compositions: in *Lakeside, Spring, Algonquin Park*, 1915, he used a grey-pink tone overall, but deep red under the water. Other times, as in *Path behind Mowat Lodge*, 1917, he sketched on a bare wood panel and allowed tiny patches of the wood to peep through. These devices helped create variations in the light in the painting. They would be almost invisible to most viewers but critical to someone as scrupulous as Thomson.



Tom Thomson, *Path behind Mowat Lodge*, 1917, oil on wood, 26.8 x 21.4 cm, Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Tom Thomson, *Path behind Mowat Lodge* (detail), 1917, oil on wood, 26.8 x 21.4 cm, Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. This detail shows the honey-coloured wood of the surface peeping through.



WHERE TO SEE

Paintings by Tom Thomson can be found in many collections across Canada. The largest collection of his work is at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, to which Dr. James MacCallum, Thomson's patron, sold many paintings in 1918 and then donated his collection in 1943. The Tom Thomson Memorial Art Gallery in Owen Sound, Thomson's hometown, was established in 1967 and contains a large collection of his work and personal effects.

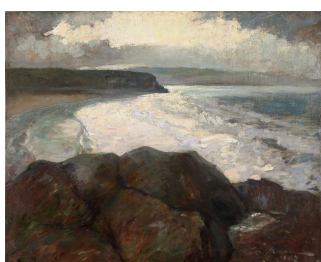
Many of Thomson's nearly 500 sketches were not titled by the artist, so the titles we have today are generic and reflect the place and time the work was painted. In some cases works are given the same title.



Although the works listed below are held by the following institutions, they may not always be on view.

AGNES ETHERINGTON ART CENTRE

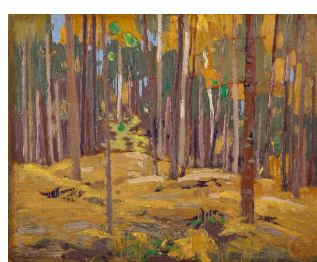
Queen's University
36 University Avenue
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
613-533-2190
agnes.queensu.ca



Tom Thomson, *Northern Shore*, 1912-13
Oil on canvas
69.2 x 86.1 cm



Tom Thomson, *The Rapids*, 1915
Oil on board
21.6 x 26.7 cm



Tom Thomson, *Autumn Woods*, 1916
Oil on wood panel
21.4 x 26.8 cm



Tom Thomson, *Autumn, Algonquin Park*, 1916
Oil on canvas board
21.3 x 26.2 cm



Tom Thomson, *First Snow*, 1916
Oil on cardboard
17.3 x 21.3 cm



ART GALLERY OF ALBERTA

2 Sir Winston Churchill Square
Edmonton, Alberta, Canada
780-422-6223
youraga.ca



Tom Thomson, *Mowat Lodge (or Fraser's Lodge)*, 1915
Oil on panel
21.9 x 27 cm



Tom Thomson, *Autumn Foliage*, 1916
Oil on wood
21.4 x 26.8 cm



Tom Thomson, *The Fisherman*, 1916-17
Oil on canvas
51.3 x 56.5 cm

ART GALLERY OF HAMILTON

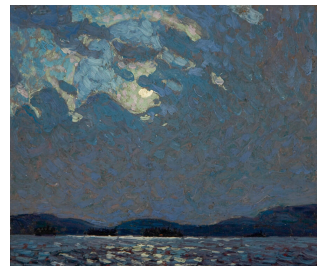
123 King Street West
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
905-527-6610
artgalleryofhamilton.com



Tom Thomson, *Ragged Lake*, 1915
Oil on wood panel
21.2 x 26.2 cm



Tom Thomson, *The Birch Grove, Autumn*, 1915-16
Oil on canvas
101.6 x 116.8 cm



Tom Thomson, *Moonlight over Canoe Lake*, 1916
Oil on wood panel
21.6 x 27 cm



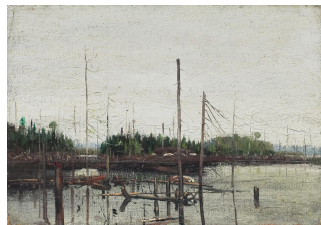
ART GALLERY OF ONTARIO

317 Dundas Street West
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
1-877-255-4246 or 416-979-6648
ago.net



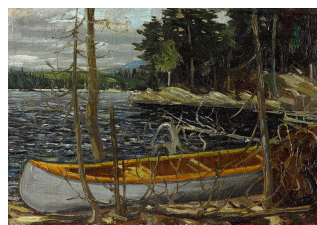
Tom Thomson, *Northern Lake*, 1912

Oil on canvas
71.7 x 102.4 cm



Tom Thomson, *Drowned Land*, 1912

Oil on paper on
plywood
17.5 x 25.1 cm



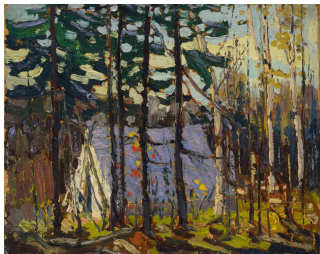
Tom Thomson, *The Canoe*, 1912

Oil on canvas on wood
17.3 x 25.3 cm



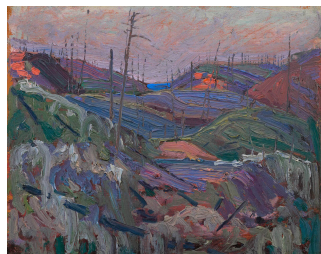
Tom Thomson, *Study for "Northern River,"* 1914-15

Gouache, brush, and
ink over graphite on
illustration board
30.0 x 26.7 cm



Tom Thomson, *Artist's Camp, Canoe Lake, Algonquin Park*, 1915

Oil on wood
21.9 x 27.2 cm



Tom Thomson, *Fire-Swept Hills*, 1915

Oil on composite
wood-pulp board
23.2 x 26.7 cm



Tom Thomson, *Autumn Foliage*, 1915

Oil on wood panel
21.6 x 26.8 cm



Tom Thomson, *Sandbank with Logs*, 1916

Oil on composite
wood-pulp board
21.3 x 26.3 cm



Tom Thomson, *Oil Sketch for The West Wind*, 1916
Oil on wood
21.4 x 26.8 cm



Tom Thomson, *The West Wind*, 1916-17
Oil on canvas
120.7 x 137.9 cm



Tom Thomson, *Northern Lights*, 1917
Oil on plywood
21.6 x 26.7 cm



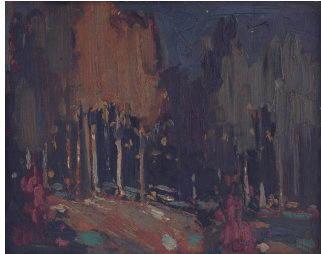
Tom Thomson, *Path behind Mowat Lodge*, 1917
Oil on wood
26.8 x 21.4 cm

ART GALLERY OF WINDSOR

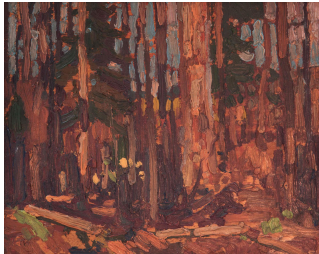
401 Riverside Drive West
Windsor, Ontario, Canada
519-977-0013
agw.ca



Tom Thomson, *White Birches*, 1914
Oil on wood
21.6 x 26.7 cm



Tom Thomson, *Nocturne*, 1914
Oil on wood
21.6 x 26.7 cm



Tom Thomson, *Algonquin Sketch*, 1914
Oil on wood
21.6 x 26 cm

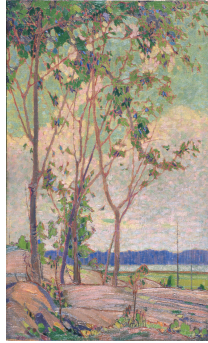


BEAVERBROOK ART GALLERY

703 Queen Street
Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada
506-458-2028
beaverbrookartgallery.org



Tom Thomson, *Portrait of an Old Lake Captain*, c. 1906
Oil on canvas laid down on
Masonite
59.7 x 34.3 cm



Tom Thomson, *A Spring Decoration*, 1915-16
Oil on canvas
101.6 x 63.5 cm

CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM

1 Vimy Place
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
1-800-555-5621
warmuseum.ca



Tom Thomson, *Decorative Landscape, Quotation from Henry van Dyke*, c. 1905
Ink and watercolour on paper
37.5 x 27.3 cm



GLENBOW MUSEUM

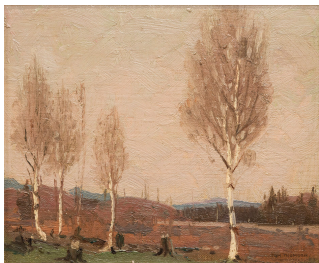
130 9 Avenue Southeast
Calgary, Alberta, Canada
403-268-4100
glenbow.org



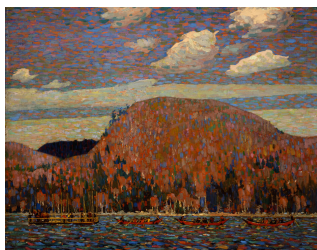
**Tom Thomson, *Autumn*,
1916**
Oil on wood panel
21.4 x 26.7 cm

HART HOUSE

University of Toronto
7 Hart House Circle
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
416-978-8398
harthouse.ca/justina-m-barnicke-gallery



Tom Thomson, *Birches*, 1913
Ink and watercolour on paper
37.5 x 27.3 cm



**Tom Thomson, *The Pointers*,
1916-17**
Oil on canvas
101 x 114.6 cm



TOM THOMSON

Life & Work by David P. Silcox

JUDITH & NORMAN ALIX ART GALLERY

147 Lochiel Street
Sarnia, Ontario, Canada
519-336-8127
jnaag.ca

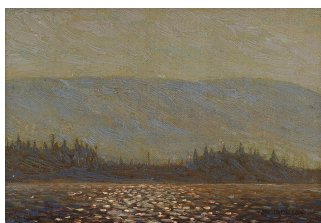


Tom Thomson, *Chill November*, 1916-17

Oil on canvas
87.5 x 102.4 cm

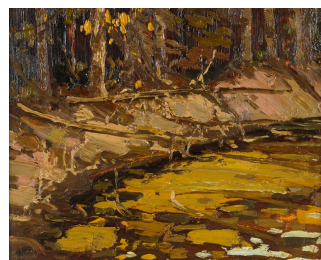
MACDONALD STEWART ART CENTRE

358 Gordon Street
Guelph, Ontario, Canada
519-837-0010
msac.ca



Tom Thomson, *Canoe Lake, Algonquin Park*, 1912

Oil on canvas board
17 x 25.5 cm



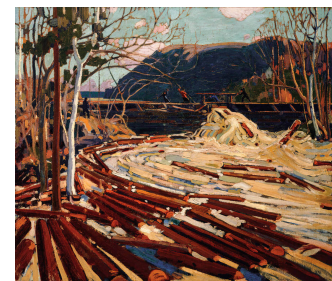
Tom Thomson, *Tea Lake: Sketch for 'The Woodland Stream,'* 1914

Oil on plywood
21.5 x 26.9 cm



Tom Thomson, *The Alligator, Algonquin Park*, 1916

Oil on composite wood-pulp board
21.5 x 26.8 cm



Tom Thomson, *The Drive*, 1916-17

Oil on canvas
120 x 137.5 cm



MCMMASTER MUSEUM OF ART

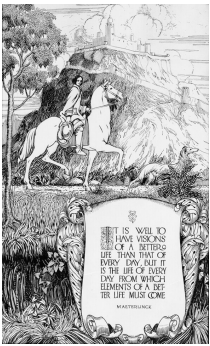
1280 Main Street West
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada
905-525-9140
museum.mcmaster.ca



Tom Thomson,
Algonquin Park, 1916
Ink and watercolour on
paper
37.5 x 27.3 cm

MCMICHAEL CANADIAN ART COLLECTION

10365 Islington Avenue
Kleinburg, Ontario, Canada
905-893-1121 or 1-888-213-1121
mcmichael.com



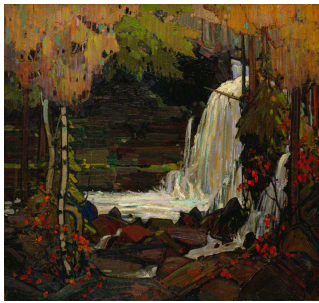
Tom Thomson,
*Decorative Landscape:
Quotation from
Maurice Maeterlinck,
c. 1908*
Ink on paper
32.6 x 19.5 cm



Tom Thomson,
*Decorative Illustration:
A Blessing by Robert
Burns, 1909*
Watercolour and ink
over graphite on
paperboard
34.9 x 24.1 cm



**Tom Thomson, *Burned
Over Land, 1916***
Oil on wood panel
21 x 26.7 cm



Tom Thomson,
*Woodland Waterfall,
1916-17*
Oil on canvas
121.9 x 132.5 cm



Tom Thomson, *Tea Lake Dam*, 1917
Oil on wood panel
21.3 x 26.2 cm



Tom Thomson, *Spring Flood*, 1917
Oil on wood panel
21.2 x 26.8 cm

MONTREAL MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

Jean-Noël Desmarais Pavilion
1380 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
514-285-2000
mbam.qc.ca/en



Tom Thomson, *Early Autumn, Algonquin Park*, 1915
Oil on wood
21.2 x 26.6 cm



Tom Thomson, *In the Northland*, 1915-16
Oil on canvas
101.7 x 114.5 cm



Tom Thomson, *Northern Lights*, 1916
Oil on wood panel
21.6 x 26.7 cm



Tom Thomson, *Algonquin Park*, 1916
Oil on wood panel
21.6 x 26.7 cm

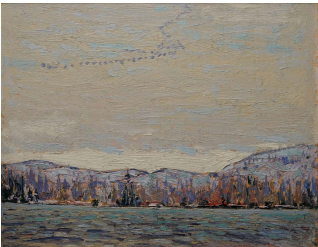


Tom Thomson, *Rock-Burnt Country*, 1916
Oil on wood panel
21.2 x 26.6 cm



MUSEUM LONDON

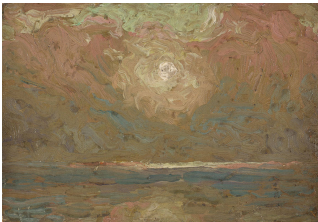
421 Ridout Street North
London, Ontario, Canada
519-661-0333
museumlondon.ca



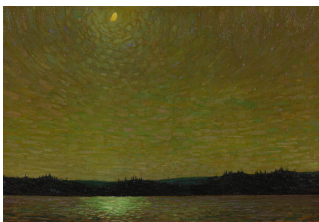
Tom Thomson, *Wild Geese: Sketch for "Chill November," 1916*
Oil on wood panel
21.4 x 26.7 cm

NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA

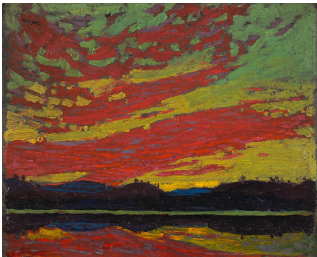
380 Sussex Drive
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
613-990-1985
gallery.ca



Tom Thomson, *Sky ("The Light That Never Was"), 1913*
Oil on canvas board
17.5 x 25.1 cm



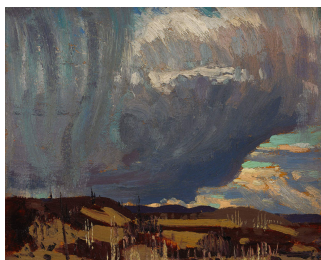
Tom Thomson, *Moonlight, 1913-14*
Oil on canvas
52.9 x 77.1 cm



Tom Thomson, *Sunset, 1915*
Oil on composite wood-pulp board
21.6 x 26.7 cm

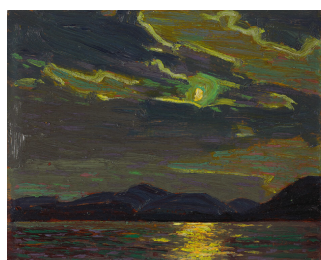


Tom Thomson, *Blue Lake: Sketch for "In the Northland," 1915*
Oil on wood
21.7 x 26.9 cm



Tom Thomson, *Approaching Snowstorm*, 1915

Oil on wood
21.3 x 26.6 cm



Tom Thomson, *Hot Summer Moonlight*, 1915

Oil on wood
21.4 x 26.7 cm



Tom Thomson, *Northern River*, 1914

Oil on canvas
115.1 x 102 cm



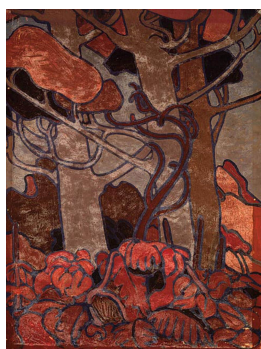
Tom Thomson, *Decorative Landscape: Birches*, 1915-16

Oil on canvas
77.1 x 72.1 cm



Tom Thomson, *Decorative Panel (II)*, 1915-16

Oil on beaverboard
120.8 x 96.4 cm



Tom Thomson, *Forest Undergrowth I*, 1915-16

Oil on beaverboard
110.1 x 84 cm



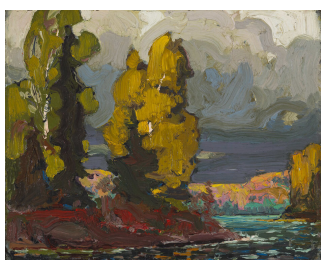
Tom Thomson, *Decorative Panel (III)*, 1915-16

Oil on beaverboard
120.8 x 96.2 cm



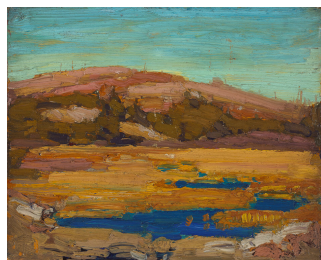
Tom Thomson, *Decorative Panel (IV)*, 1915-16

Oil on beaverboard
120.8 x 96.4 cm



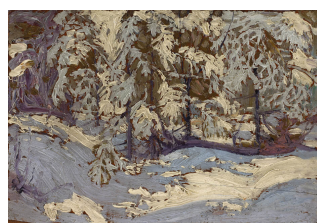
Tom Thomson, *Poplars by a Lake*, 1916

Oil on grey wood-pulp board
21.5 x 26.8 cm



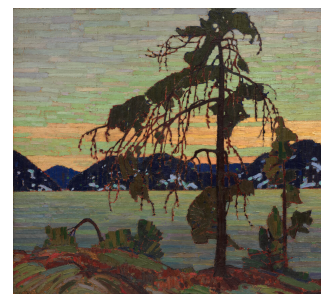
Tom Thomson, *Cranberry Marsh*, 1916

Oil on wood panel
21.9 x 27 cm



Tom Thomson, *First Snow in Autumn*, 1916

Oil on panel
12.8 x 18.2 cm



Tom Thomson, *The Jack Pine*, 1916-17

Oil on canvas
127.9 x 139.8 cm



PEEL ART GALLERY, MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES

9 Wellington Street East
Brampton, Ontario, Canada
905-791-4055
pama.peelregion.ca



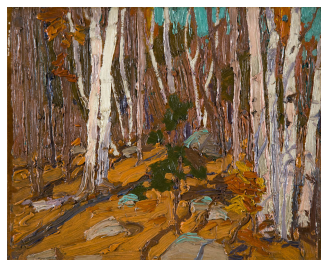
**Tom Thomson, *Sketchbook*,
c. 1905-11**
Graphite on paper
9.9 x 17.1 cm

RIVERBRINK ART MUSEUM

116 Queenston Street
Queenston, Ontario, Canada
905-262-4510
riverbrink.org



**Tom Thomson, *Sketch
for "The Jack Pine,"*
1916**
Oil on wood
21 x 26.7 cm



**Tom Thomson, *Forest
Interior (Birches)*, 1916**
Oil on wood
22 x 26.4 cm



**Tom Thomson,
Twilight, 1916-17**
Oil on wood panel
21.3 x 28 cm

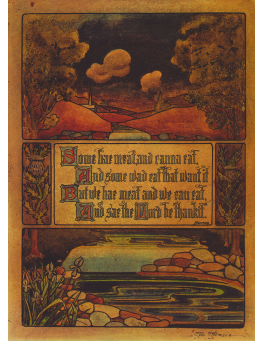


TOM THOMSON MEMORIAL ART GALLERY

840 First Avenue West
Owen Sound, Ontario, Canada
519-376-1932
tomthomson.org



Tom Thomson, *Study of a Woman's Head*, c. 1903
Ink and crayon on paper
11 x 8 cm



Tom Thomson, *Burns' Blessing*, 1906
Watercolour, gouache, and ink on paper
29.3 x 22 cm



Tom Thomson, *Northland Sunset*, 1912-13
Oil on canvas on cardboard
15 x 23 cm



Tom Thomson, *Canoe Lake, Mowat Lodge*, 1914
Oil on plywood
21.4 x 26.7 cm

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

15 King's College Circle
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
416-978-7516
utac.utoronto.ca



Tom Thomson, *Snowbank*, 1916
Oil on composite wood-pulp board
21.7 x 26.7 cm

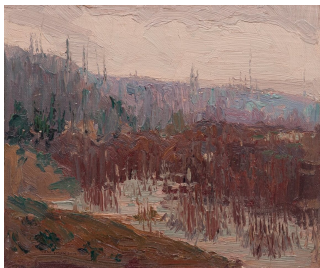


TOM THOMSON

Life & Work by David P. Silcox

VANCOUVER ART GALLERY

750 Hornby Street
Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
604-662-4700
vanartgallery.bc.ca



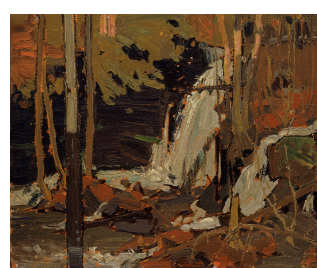
Tom Thomson, *Cat-tails, Canoe Lake*, 1914

Oil on canvas on
paperboard
21.7 x 26.9 cm



Tom Thomson, *Nocturne: Forest Spires*, 1916

Oil on plywood
21.6 x 26.6 cm



Tom Thomson, *The Waterfall*, 1916

Oil on wood
21.1 x 26.7 cm

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY, UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

73 Queen's Park Crescent East
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
416-585-4521
vicu.utoronto.ca



Tom Thomson, *Opulent October*, 1914

Oil on wood
21.6 x 26.7 cm



WINNIPEG ART GALLERY

300 Memorial Boulevard
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
204-786-6641
wag.ca



Tom Thomson, *White Caps, Smoke Lake*, 1913

Oil on canvas mounted on wood-pulp board
18 x 25.5 cm



Tom Thomson, *Early Snow*, 1916-17

Oil on canvas
45.4 x 45.5 cm



NOTES

BIOGRAPHY

1. Leonard Rossell, "Reminiscences of Grip, Members of the Group of Seven and Tom Thomson," Library and Archives Canada, MG 30, D 284, Tom Thomson Collection, T485.R82, p. 3; Albert H. Robson, *Canadian Landscape Painters* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1932), 138.
2. Thomson was never a member of the Arts and Letters Club himself.
3. Robson found Thomson "a most diligent, reliable and capable craftsman." Albert H. Robson, *Canadian Landscape Painters* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1932), 138.
4. James MacCallum, "Tom Thomson: Painter of the North," *Canadian Magazine*, March 31, 1918, 376.
5. For an excellent account of Thomson's life, see Charles C. Hill, "Tom Thomson, Painter," in *Tom Thomson*, ed. Dennis Reid and Charles C. Hill (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2010), 111-43.
6. Harold Town, "Introduction," in *Tom Thomson: The Silence and the Storm*, 5th ed., ed. David P. Silcox and Harold Town (Toronto: HarperCollins Canada, forthcoming 2016).
7. Quoted in Joan Murray, "Chronology," in *Tom Thomson*, ed. Dennis Reid and Charles C. Hill (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2010), 317.

KEY WORKS: BURNS' BLESSING

1. Arthur Lismer, "Tom Thomson," c. 1942, Library and Archives Canada, Lismer Papers, MG 30 D 184, vol. 2 "Tom Thomson."
2. Charles C. Hill, "Tom Thomson, Painter," in *Tom Thomson*, ed. Dennis Reid and Charles C. Hill (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2010), 329n19.
3. A.Y. Jackson, *A Painter's Country: The Autobiography of A.Y. Jackson* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1958), 21.

KEY WORKS: NORTHERN RIVER

1. David Milne to Harry McCurry, April 1, 1932, Milne Papers, National Gallery of Canada Archives, Ottawa.

KEY WORKS: SUNSET

1. Ross King, *Defiant Spirits: The Modernist Revolution of the Group of Seven* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2010), 182.

KEY WORKS: APPROACHING SNOWSTORM

1. Lawren S. Harris, *The Story of the Group of Seven* (Toronto: Rous and Mann Press, 1964), 19.



KEY WORKS: AFTER THE STORM

1. David P. Silcox and Harold Town, *Tom Thomson: The Silence and the Storm*, 5th ed. (Toronto: HarperCollins Canada, forthcoming 2016).

SIGNIFICANCE & CRITICAL ISSUES

1. Lawren S. Harris, *The Story of the Group of Seven* (Toronto: Rous and Mann Press, 1964), 7.

2. Harold Town, "Introduction," in *Tom Thomson: The Silence and the Storm*, 5th ed., ed. David P. Silcox and Harold Town (Toronto: HarperCollins Canada, forthcoming 2016).

3. See John Wadland, "Tom Thomson's Places," in *Tom Thomson*, ed. Dennis Reid and Charles C. Hill (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2010), 85-109.

4. See, for example, Lynda Jessup, "Art for a Nation," and Leslie Dawn, "The Britishness of Canadian Art," in *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art*, ed. John O'Brian and Peter White (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 187-201. Also see Marilyn J. McKay, *Picturing the Land: Narrating Territories in Canadian Landscape Art, 1500-1950* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), chaps. 8 and 9.

5. Cited in Marilyn J. McKay, *Picturing the Land: Narrating Territories in Canadian Landscape Art, 1500-1950* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 187.

6. *The Studio: An Illustrated Magazine of Fine and Applied Art*, 31 (1904): 350.

7. David Milne to Harry McCurry, Milne Papers, 1932, National Gallery of Canada Archives.

8. See Dennis Reid, "Photographs by Tom Thomson," in *National Gallery of Canada Bulletin*, no. 16 (1970).

9. Sherrill Grace, *Inventing Tom Thomson: From Biographical Fictions to Fictional Autobiographies and Reproductions* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), 96.

STYLE & TECHNIQUE

1. Reviewer (probably Frederick Wedmore) writing in *The Standard*, July 27, 1888, quoted in *The Discovery of Constable*, ed. Ian Fleming-Williams and Leslie Parris (London: Holmes and Meier, 1984), 88.

2. See Robert Stacey, "Tom Thomson as Applied Artist," in *Tom Thomson*, ed. Dennis Reid and Charles C. Hill (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2010), 47-63.

3. Ross King, *Defiant Spirits: The Modernist Revolution of the Group of Seven* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2010), 14.



4. Quoted in Marylin J. McKay, *Picturing the Land: Narrating Territories in Canadian Landscape Art, 1500-1950* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011), 185.

5. Sandra Webster-Cook and Anne Ruggles, "Technical Studies on Thomson's Materials and Working Methods," in *Tom Thomson*, ed. Dennis Reid and Charles C. Hill (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2010), 145-51.



GLOSSARY

Abstract Expressionism

A style that flourished in New York in the 1940s and 1950s, defined by its combination of formal abstraction and self-conscious expression. The term describes a wide variety of work; among the most famous Abstract Expressionists are Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Barnett Newman, and Willem de Kooning.

academic tradition

Associated with the Royal Academies of Art established in France and England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries respectively, the academic tradition emphasized drawing, painting, and sculpture in a style highly influenced by ancient classical art. Subject matter for painting was hierarchically ranked, with history painting of religious, mythological, allegorical, and historical figures holding the position of greatest importance, followed, in order, by genre painting, portraiture, still lifes, and landscapes.

Académie Julian

A private art school established by Rudolphe Julian in Paris in 1868. Among the many Canadian artists who studied there are Maurice Cullen, J.W. Morrice, Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté, and Clarence Gagnon.

Algonquin School

An early twentieth-century group of Canadian landscape painters, including Franklin Carmichael, A.Y. Jackson, Frank Johnston, Arthur Lismer, J.E.H. MacDonald, Tom Thomson, and F.H. Varley. Most went on to form the Group of Seven. They met regularly and were interested in developing a unique art form inspired by the Canadian wilderness.

Armory Show

Presented in New York, Chicago, and Boston in 1913, the *International Exhibition of Modern Art*, or the Armory Show, marked a seminal moment in the American modern art movement. Introducing progressive American artists and the European avant-garde for the first time to a wide U.S. audience, the exhibition featured the works of hundreds of artists, many of which were considered shocking at the time.

Art Association of Montreal (AAM)

Founded in 1860 as an offshoot of the Montreal Society of Artists (itself dating to 1847), the Art Association of Montreal became the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts in 1947. The MMFA is now a major international museum, with more than 760,000 visitors annually.

Art Nouveau

Thriving in Europe and the United States from the late nineteenth century until the First World War, this decorative style, characterized by flowing organic shapes and serpentine lines, had an impact on architecture and on graphic and decorative arts in particular, though its influence is also reflected in painting and sculpture.



Arts and Crafts

A precursor to modernist design, this decorative arts movement developed in the mid-nineteenth century in England in response to what its proponents saw as the dehumanizing effects of industrialization. Spearheaded by William Morris, the Arts and Crafts movement valued craftsmanship and simplicity of form and frequently incorporated nature motifs in the design of ordinary objects.

Arts and Letters Club of Toronto

A Toronto-based club established in 1908 to promote culture, it provided a space in which artists, architects, writers, musicians, and art patrons could practise and perform their art as well as engage in discussion in a convivial atmosphere. Founding members of the Group of Seven frequently met there to relax, exhibit, and promote their work. The club, which still operates today, was originally male-only; however, on February 19, 1985, female members began to be admitted.

Arts Club of Montreal

Founded in 1912 by a group of successful artists, sculptors, architects, and writers of high social status and modelled on the English gentlemen's clubs of London in the nineteenth century. Notable members were architect William Maxwell Sutherland (founder and first president); painter and professor of art history, William Brymner; Maurice Cullen; A.Y. Jackson; Henri Hébert; Alfred Laliberté; and James Wilson Morrice. In 1996 the membership was opened to women. The club is now a professional association representing a wide range of artists.

Beatty, J.W. (Canadian, 1869–1941)

An influential painter and educator at the Ontario College of Art (now OCAD University), Toronto, who sought to develop a uniquely Canadian style of painting. Beatty was a contemporary of Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven, though his painting style retained more traditional aesthetics than their work did. His most renowned painting, *The Evening Cloud of the Northland*, 1910, is held at the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Blaue Reiter

Formed in 1911, a collective of artists of disparate styles and concerns—including Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, August Macke, and Franz Marc—regarded as representing the apex of German Expressionism. The group had only two exhibitions before disbanding with the onset of the First World War.

Brancusi, Constantin (Romanian, 1876–1957)

An abstract sculptor, whose unique focus on expressing natural forms as simply as possible influenced later sculptors, including Amedeo Modigliani and Carl Andre. Active for most of his life in Paris, Brancusi became known in America following his inclusion in the Armory Show, the 1913 International Exhibition of Modern Art.

Broadhead, William S. (British, 1888–1960)

A British painter and commercial artist who worked at Grip Limited with Tom Thomson and other artists who went on to form the Group of Seven. He accompanied Thomson on a sketching trip in northern Ontario in 1912.



Carmichael, Franklin (Canadian, 1890–1945)

An original member of the Group of Seven, Carmichael created landscapes in watercolour as well as in oil. He was a founding member of the Canadian Group of Painters and the Canadian Society of Painters in Water Colour. Like so many of his colleagues, he earned his living primarily as a commercial artist and, in 1932, he became head of the Graphic Design and Commercial Art Department at the Ontario College of Art (now OCAD University), Toronto.

Carr, Emily (Canadian, 1871–1945)

A pre-eminent B.C.-based artist and writer, Carr is renowned today for her bold and vibrant images of both the Northwest Coast landscape and its Native peoples. Educated in California, England, and France, she was influenced by a variety of modern art movements but ultimately developed a unique aesthetic style. She was one of the first West Coast artists to achieve national recognition. (See *Emily Carr: Life & Work* by Lisa Baldissera.)

Constable, John (British, 1776–1837)

Viewed today, along with J.M.W. Turner, as one of the greatest British landscape and sky painters of the nineteenth century. Constable painted mostly in his native region of Suffolk and the surrounding areas. He took a more expressive approach to his paintings than many of his predecessors and contemporaries.

Cruikshank, William (Scottish, 1848–1922)

A Scottish-born educator and portrait, figure, and scene painter who immigrated to Canada in 1871. Cruikshank was a long-time instructor at the Ontario College of Art (now OCAD University), Toronto. Many painters who themselves became notable and influential Canadian artists studied under Cruikshank, including Franklin Carmichael, Frank Johnston, J.E.H. MacDonald, and, it seems, Tom Thomson too.

Cubism

A radical style of painting developed by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in Paris between 1907 and 1914, defined by the representation of numerous perspectives at once. Cubism is considered crucial to the history of modern art for its enormous international impact; famous practitioners also include Juan Gris and Francis Picabia.

de Kooning, Willem (Dutch/American, 1904–1997)

Although a prominent Abstract Expressionist, de Kooning was not concerned with strict abstraction—figures appear in the dense and riotous brushwork that characterizes much of his work. Among his most famous works are those of the *Women* series, first exhibited in 1953 to much critical scorn.

Doig, Peter (British, b. 1959)

An Edinburgh-born artist who lived in Canada during his childhood and youth and later settled in Trinidad, Doig's paintings command high prices today. Influenced by modernism and popular culture, he uses heightened colour and



technique to evoke strange landscapes, often with a human presence and an unsettling, otherworldly mood. He travels widely, always paints in a studio, and often produces works in a series.

Dorland, Kim (Canadian, b. 1974)

A Canadian landscape and portrait painter known for his thick, almost sculptural, impasto surfaces. In the 2013–14 exhibition *You Are Here: Kim Dorland and the Return to Painting* at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, in Kleinburg, Ontario, fifty of his paintings hung alongside works by Tom Thomson, David Milne, and Emily Carr.

Expressionism

An intense, emotional style of art that values the representation of the artist's subjective inner feelings and ideas. German Expressionism started in the early twentieth century in Germany and Austria. In painting, Expressionism is associated with an intense, jarring use of colour and brush strokes that are not naturalistic.

Fauvism

The style of the Fauves (French for “wild beasts”), a group of painters who took their name from a derogatory phrase used by the French journalist Louis Vauxcelles. As a historical movement, Fauvism began at the controversial Salon d'Automne in 1905, and ended less than five years later, in early 1910. Fauvism was characterized by bold, unmixed colours, obvious brush strokes, and a subjective approach to representation. Among the most important of the Fauves were Henri Matisse, André Derain, and Maurice de Vlaminck.

Futurism

Founded in 1909, this Italian movement in modern art and literature embraced elements of Cubism and Neo-Impressionism. The Futurist aesthetic idealized technological advances, war, dynamism, and the energy of modern life. Among the most renowned Futurist artists are Giacomo Balla, Umberto Boccioni, Carlo Carrà, and Luigi Russolo.

golden section

A mathematical concept applied to proportion, in which a straight line or rectangle is divided into two unequal parts: the smaller portion relates to the larger portion by the same ratio that the larger portion relates to the whole.

gouache

An artists' material, gouache is watercolour that is mixed with white pigment and the binding agent gum arabic, rendering it opaque. Gouache has been used in numerous painting traditions from antiquity, including manuscript illumination and Indian and European miniatures.

Grip Limited

A Toronto-based design and advertising firm established in 1873 to publish the weekly satirical magazine *Grip*. In the early twentieth century Grip Limited employed several artists who championed a distinctly Canadian style of



landscape painting: Tom Thomson and some members of the future Group of Seven—Franklin Carmichael, Frank Johnston, Arthur Lismer, J.E.H. MacDonald, and F.H. Varley.

Group of Seven

A progressive and nationalistic school of landscape painting in Canada, active between 1920 (the year of the group's first exhibition, at the Art Gallery of Toronto, now the Art Gallery of Ontario) and 1933. Founding members were the artists Franklin Carmichael, Lawren Harris, A.Y. Jackson, Frank Johnston, Arthur Lismer, J.E.H. MacDonald, and Frederick Varley.

Harris, Lawren (Canadian, 1885–1970)

A founding member of the Group of Seven in Toronto in 1920, Harris was widely considered its unofficial leader. His landscape-painting style, unlike that of the other members of the Group, evolved into pure abstraction. The Group of Seven broke up in 1933, and when the Canadian Group of Painters was formed in 1933, Harris was elected its first president.

Henri, Robert (American, 1865–1929)

A painter, writer, and teacher known primarily for his influence on the development of twentieth-century American art. A leading figure of the Ashcan School, Henri championed daily urban life as subject matter for art. He taught in New York for more than twenty-five years.

Impressionism

A highly influential art movement that originated in France in the 1860s and is associated with the emergence of modern urban European society. Claude Monet, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, and other Impressionists rejected the subjects and formal rigours of academic art in favour of scenes of nature and daily life and the careful rendering of atmospheric effects. They often painted outdoors.

Jackson, A.Y. (Canadian, 1882–1974)

A founding member of the Group of Seven and an important voice in the formation of a distinctively Canadian artistic tradition. A Montreal native, Jackson studied painting in Paris before moving to Toronto in 1913; his northern landscapes are characterized by the bold brushstrokes and vivid colours of his Impressionist and Post-Impressionist influences.

Johnston, Frank H. (Canadian, 1888–1949)

A founding member of the Group of Seven. In 1921, he became principal of the Winnipeg School of Art and later taught at the Ontario College of Art (now OCAD University), Toronto. He formally severed his ties with the group in 1924, preferring to paint in a realistic style less controversial at the time than his earlier decorative work.

Kane, Paul (Irish/Canadian, 1810–1871)

Influenced by George Catlin, this nineteenth-century painter and explorer spent extensive time documenting Aboriginal peoples in North America and depicting, in a traditional European style, scenes of their culture and



landscapes. The Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto houses one hundred paintings and several hundred sketches by Kane. (See *Paul Kane: Life & Work* by Arlene Gehmacher.)

Lismer, Arthur (British/Canadian, 1885–1969)

A landscape painter and founding member of the Group of Seven, Lismer immigrated to Canada from England in 1911. He was also an influential educator of adults and children, and he created children's art schools at both the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto (1933) and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (1946).

MacCallum, James (Canadian, 1860–1943)

An ophthalmologist in Toronto, Dr. MacCallum was a friend and patron of Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven. With Lawren Harris, in 1913 he planned and financed the Studio Building in Toronto as a place where artists could live and work. In 1914, by offering to support A.Y. Jackson and Tom Thomson for a year, he launched their careers as full-time painters. He bequeathed his collection to the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

MacDonald, J.E.H. (British/Canadian, 1873–1932)

A painter, printmaker, calligrapher, teacher, poet, and designer, and a founding member of the Group of Seven. His sensitive treatment of the Canadian landscape was influenced by Walt Whitman's poetry and Henry David Thoreau's views on nature.

Matisse, Henri (French, 1869–1954)

A painter, sculptor, printmaker, draftsman, and designer, aligned at different times with the Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, and Fauvists. By the 1920s he was, with Pablo Picasso, one of the most famous painters of his generation, known for his remarkable use of colour and line.

Milne, David (Canadian, 1881–1953)

A painter, printmaker, and illustrator whose work—principally landscapes—displays the tonal brilliance and concern with process of his Impressionist and Post-Impressionist influences. Milne lived in New York early in his career, where he trained at the Art Students League and participated in the Armory Show in 1913.

modernism

A movement extending from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century in all the arts, modernism rejected academic traditions in favour of innovative styles developed in response to contemporary industrialized society. Beginning in painting with the Realist movement led by Gustave Courbet, it progressed through Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, and Cubism and on to abstraction. By the 1960s, anti-authoritarian postmodernist styles such as Pop art, Conceptual art, and Neo-Expressionism blurred the distinction between high art and mass culture.

Monet, Claude (French, 1840–1926)

A founder of the Impressionist movement in France. Monet's landscapes and seascapes are among the canonical works of Western art. Introduced to *plein*



air painting as a teenager, Monet returned to it throughout his life as a means of exploring the atmospheric effects and perceptual phenomena that so interested him as an artist.

Morrice, James Wilson (Canadian, 1865–1924)

One of Canada's first modernist painters and first artists to gain international recognition, during his lifetime Morrice was nonetheless more celebrated in Europe than he was at home. He is best known for richly coloured landscapes that show the influence of James McNeill Whistler and Post-Impressionism.

Munch, Edvard (Norwegian, 1863–1944)

Prefiguring the Expressionist movement, Munch's work prominently represented the artist's own emotions—fear, loneliness, sexual longing, and dread. A revered and prolific painter, printmaker, and draftsman, Munch is best known for his painting *The Scream*.

Ontario Society of Artists (OSA)

Canada's oldest extant professional artists' association, formed in 1872 by seven artists from various disciplines. Its first annual exhibition was held in 1873. The OSA eventually played an important role in the founding of OCAD University and the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto.

Orphism

French poet and critic Guillaume Apollinaire conceived the term "Orphism" around 1912 in reference to the abstract paintings of Robert Delaunay. It is a modern art form aligned with early Cubism, yet distinct from it in its harmonious use of colour. The term alludes to the ancient Greek poet and musician Orpheus and refers to the musical quality associated with Orphism.

Picasso, Pablo (Spanish, 1881–1973)

One of the most famous and influential artists of his time, Picasso was a prominent member of the Parisian avant-garde circle that included Henri Matisse and Georges Braque. His painting *Les demoiselles d'Avignon*, 1906–7, is considered by many to be the most important of the twentieth century.

Pointillism

A painting technique developed in 1886 by Georges Seurat and Paul Signac as an offshoot of Impressionism. In this style, rather than broken brushstrokes, artists used thousands of small dots of intense and complementary colours that coalesced to make their images. In this way they developed an understanding of how the human eye works and the reality of light as a spectrum of colour.

Pollock, Jackson (American, 1912–1956)

Leader of the Abstract Expressionist movement, best known for his drip paintings of the 1940s and 1950s. Pollock is also closely associated with action painting, in which the act of painting is gestural and the artist approaches the canvas with little notion of what he or she will create.



Rous and Mann Limited

A Toronto printing firm founded in 1909. In 1912 Albert Robson became director of its art department, and his loyal staff from the rival Grip Limited followed him there. They included Tom Thomson and several members of the future Group of Seven: Arthur Lismer, Franklin Carmichael, Frank Johnston, F.H. Varley, and, later, Alfred Casson.

Seurat, Georges (French, 1859–1891)

An influential painter, Seurat was a pioneer of the Neo-Impressionist movement, departing from Impressionism's relative spontaneity and practising more formal structure and symbolic content. Along with Paul Signac, he developed Pointillism, a technique adopted by other painters such as Camille Pissarro, Piet Mondrian, and Wassily Kandinsky.

Suprematism

A movement developed about 1915 by the Russian artist and writer Kazimir Malevich, who proclaimed it finished before 1920. Characterized by radical austerity of form and geometric abstraction, Suprematism had a powerful influence on European and American art and design of the twentieth century.

Surrealism

An early twentieth-century literary and artistic movement that began in Paris. Surrealism aimed to express the workings of the unconscious, free of convention and reason, and was characterized by fantastic images and incongruous juxtapositions. The movement spread globally, influencing film, theatre, and music.

Town, Harold (Canadian, 1924–1990)

Town was a founding member of Painters Eleven and a leader in Toronto's art scene in the 1950s and 1960s. An internationally recognized abstract artist, he created paintings, collages, sculptures, and prints with brilliant effect and developed a unique form of monotype, "single autographic prints." (See *Harold Town: Life & Work* by Gerta Moray.)

Turner, J.M.W. (British, 1775–1851)

Widely considered the foremost British landscape painter of the nineteenth century, Turner imbued his paintings with an expressive romanticism. His subject matter ranged from local landscapes to otherworldly natural events. He has been heralded as a precursor to both Impressionism and modernist abstract art.

van der Weyden, Harry (American, 1864–1952)

This Boston-born artist painted Impressionist landscapes and portraits in oil. He emigrated to England in 1870 and, after participating in the First World War, he painted a series of war scenes.

van Gogh, Vincent (Dutch, 1853–1890)

Among the most recognizable and beloved of modernist painters, van Gogh is the creator of *Starry Night* and *Vase with Sunflowers*, both from 1889. He is a



nearly mythological figure in Western culture, the archetypal “tortured artist” who achieves posthumous fame after a lifetime of struggle and neglect.

Varley, F.H. (Frederick Horsman) (British/Canadian, 1881–1969)

A founding member of the Group of Seven, known for his contributions to Canadian portraiture as well as landscape painting. Originally from Sheffield, England, Varley moved to Toronto in 1912 at the encouragement of his friend Arthur Lismer. From 1926 to 1936 he taught at the Vancouver School of Decorative and Applied Arts, now known as Emily Carr University of Art + Design.

Wieland, Joyce (Canadian, 1930–1998)

A central figure in contemporary Canadian art, Wieland engaged with painting, filmmaking, and cloth and plastic assemblage to explore with wit and passion ideas related to gender, national identity, and the natural world. In 1971 she became the first living Canadian woman artist to have a solo exhibition at the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa. (See *Joyce Wieland: Life & Work* by Johanne Sloan.)



SOURCES & RESOURCES

Tom Thomson (1877–1917) is included in all the general histories of Canadian art and in most books on the Group of Seven. In addition, several books and articles focus on him alone. Unfortunately, he wrote few letters, and the only first-hand accounts of him come from his friends in the group and from comments made by rangers and others in Algonquin Park who knew him. As would be expected for Canada's best-loved painter, his exhibition history is rich.

KEY EXHIBITIONS

Memorial exhibitions of Thomson's work following his death were organized in Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto. Thereafter his works were usually shown in group or survey exhibitions, the most important of which were the British Empire Exhibitions at Wembley Park, London, in 1924 and 1925, and *Painting Canada: Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven* at the Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, 2011-12. The first ambitious retrospective was organized by Joan Murray at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, in 1971. Thirty years passed before the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, and the Art Gallery of Ontario, collaborated on a major travelling retrospective in 2002, an exhibition that provided much new research by a phalanx of curators.



Installation view of Canadian Section of the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley Park in 1924, Thomson's *The West Wind*, 1916-17, *Northern River*, 1914-15, and *The Jack Pine*, 1916-17, were prominently featured.



Installation view of *The Art of Tom Thomson*, organized by the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, in 1971.

1913 April 5-26, 1913, *Ontario Society of Artists, 41st Annual Exhibition*, Art Museum of Toronto. Thomson exhibited for the first time at this exhibition, and his painting *Northern Lake*, 1912-13, was purchased by the Government of Ontario for \$250.

1914 Ontario Society of Artists, 42nd Annual Exhibition, Art Museum of Toronto. From this exhibition the National Gallery of Canada purchased *Moonlight*, 1913-14, for \$150, its first of several purchases during Thomson's lifetime.

1915 March 13-April 10, 1915, *Ontario Society of Artists, 43rd Annual Exhibition*, Art Museum of Toronto. The National Gallery of Canada bought *Northern River*, 1914-15, from this exhibition for \$500.

1916 March 11-April 15, 1916, *Ontario Society of Artists, 44th Annual Exhibition*, Art Museum of Toronto. The National Gallery of Canada purchased *Spring Ice*, 1915-16, from this exhibition for \$300.

1917 December 1917, *Tom Thomson*, Arts and Letters Club, Toronto.

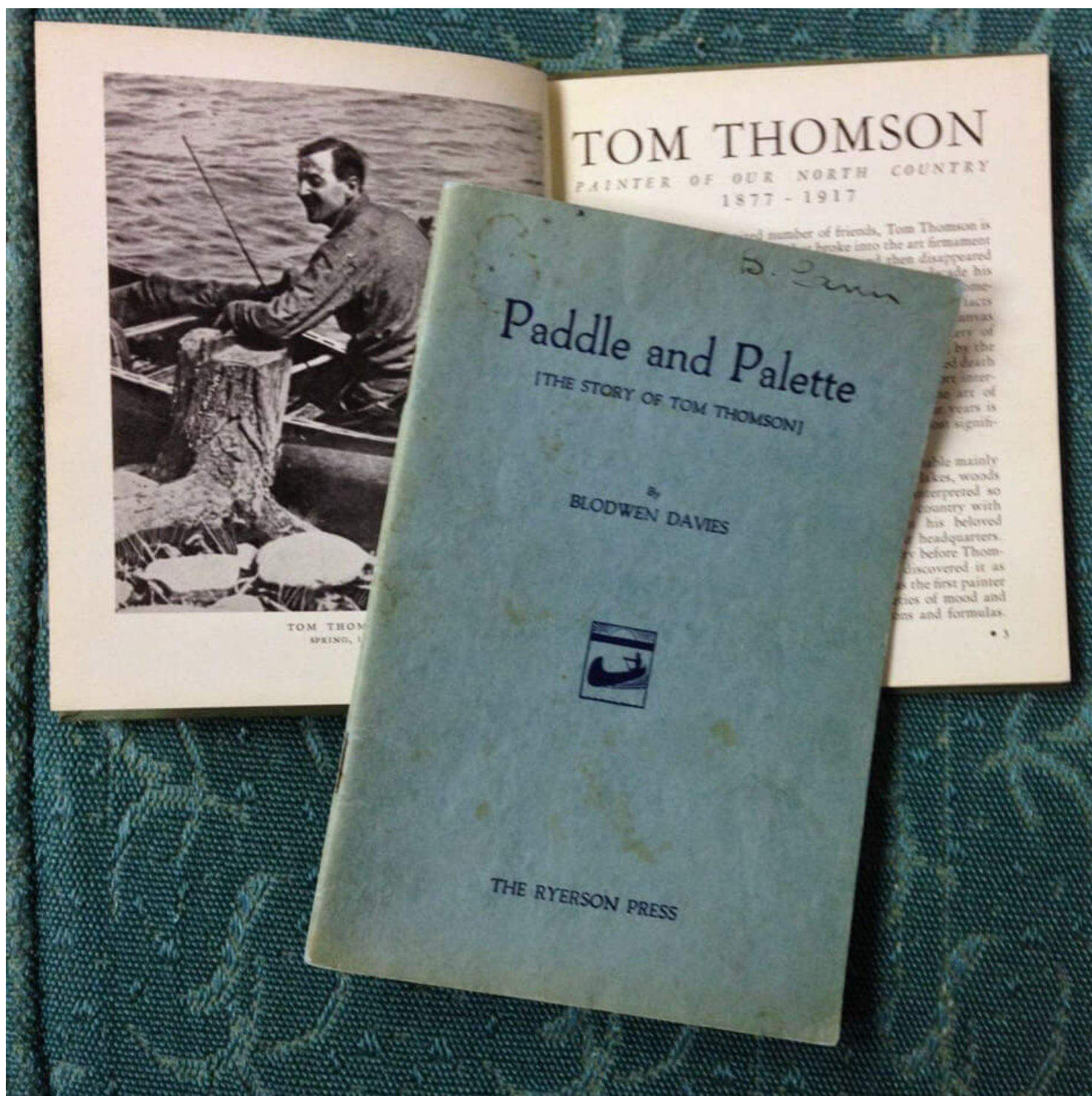
1919 March 1-21, 1919, *Exhibition of Paintings by the Late Tom Thomson*, Arts Club, Montreal. Travelled to Art Association of Montreal, March 25-April 12.



-
- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 1920 | February 14–29, 1920, <i>Memorial Exhibition of Paintings by Tom Thomson</i> , Art Gallery of Toronto. The Group of Seven was formed shortly after the exhibition closed. |
|-------------|---|
-
- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 1923 | November–December 1923, <i>Exhibition of Tom Thomson Sketches</i> , Hart House, University of Toronto. |
|-------------|--|
-
- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 1924 | April 23–October 31, 1924, British Empire Exhibition, Wembley Park, London. Thomson is singled out by British art critics as a major artist. |
|-------------|--|
-
- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 1925 | May–October 1925, British Empire Exhibition, Wembley Park, London. |
|-------------|--|
-
- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 1938 | October 15–December 15, 1938, <i>A Century of Canadian Art</i> , Tate Gallery, London. |
|-------------|--|
-
- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 1955 | November–December 1957, <i>Tom Thomson Travelling Exhibition: Sketches and Painting from the National Gallery of Canada Collection</i> . In chronological order: Edmonton Museum of Arts; Calgary Allied Arts Centre; University of Manitoba, Winnipeg; Southern Alberta Art Gallery, Lethbridge; Art Gallery of Greater Victoria; University of British Columbia, Fine Arts Gallery, Vancouver; Regina Public Library; Winnipeg Art Gallery; Sarnia Public Library; Kitchener-Waterloo Art Association; Yarmouth Art Society; Colchester Chapter of the IODE, Truro; Louisbourg Chapter of the IODE; Amherst Art Association; Moncton Society of Art; Fredericton Art Club; University of New Brunswick, Fredericton; Art Centre, Saint John, New Brunswick; Dalhousie University, Halifax; Nova Scotia College of Art, Halifax; Glenhyrst Gardens, Brantford; London Public Library and Art Museum; Willistead Library and Art Gallery, Windsor; Winnipeg Art Gallery. |
|-------------|--|
-
- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 1971 | October 10–December 13, 1971, <i>The Art of Tom Thomson</i> , Art Gallery of Ontario. This was the first retrospective exhibition of Thomson's work. |
|-------------|--|
-
- | | |
|-------------|---|
| 1977 | May 4–June 1, 1977, <i>The Tom Thomson Memorial Exhibition</i> , Tom Thomson Memorial Gallery and Museum of Fine Art, Owen Sound. |
|-------------|---|
-
- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 2002 | June 7–September 8, 2002, <i>Tom Thomson</i> , National Gallery of Canada. Travelled to Vancouver, Edmonton, Quebec City, and Toronto. |
|-------------|--|
-
- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 2011–12 | October 19, 2011–January 8, 2012, <i>Painting Canada: Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven</i> , Dulwich Picture Gallery, London. Travelled to the National Museum, Oslo, Norway; the Groninger Museum, Groningen, The Netherlands; and the McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario. |
|----------------|--|

BOOKS

The Thomson canon includes exhibition catalogues, beautiful art books, and personal recollections. Surprisingly, given the artist's stature, there have been few critical studies.



Cover of the *Paddle and Palette: The Story of Tom Thomson*, which features notes on the pictures prepared by painter Arthur Lismer.

Addison, Ottelyn. *Tom Thomson: The Algonquin Years*. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1969.

Colgate, William. *Canadian Art: Its Origins and Development*. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1943.

Davies, Blodwen. *Paddle and Palette: The Story of Tom Thomson*. Notes on the pictures prepared by Arthur Lismer. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1930.

Dejardin, Ian, et al. *Painting Canada: Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven*. Edited by Amy Concannon. London: Philip Wilson Publishers. The catalogue for the exhibition in 2011–12 at the Dulwich Picture Gallery, London.

Grace, Sherrill. *Inventing Tom Thomson: From Biographical Fictions to Fictional Autobiographies and Reproductions*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004.

Harper, J. Russell. *Painting in Canada: A History*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966.

Harris, Lawren. "The Group of Seven in Canadian History." In *Canadian Historical Society, Report of the Annual Meeting Held at Victoria and Vancouver, June 16–19, 1948*. Edited by R.A. Preston. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948.

———. *The Story of the Group of Seven*. Toronto: Rous and Mann Press, 1964. This account is more reliable than the one in A.Y. Jackson's autobiography *A Painter's Country*.

Housser, F.B. *A Canadian Art Movement: The Story of the Group of Seven*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1926.

Jackson, A.Y. *A Painter's Country*. Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1958. Paperback edition, 1964.

King, Ross. *Defiant Spirits: The Modernist Revolution of the Group of Seven*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2010.

Lismer, Arthur. *Tom Thomson: The Story of a Man Who Looked for Beauty and for the Truth in the Wilderness*. Vancouver: Mitchell Press, 1967.

MacGregor, Roy. *Northern Light: The Enduring Mystery of Tom Thomson and the Woman Who Loved Him*. Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2010.

MacTavish, Newton. *The Fine Arts in Canada*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1925.

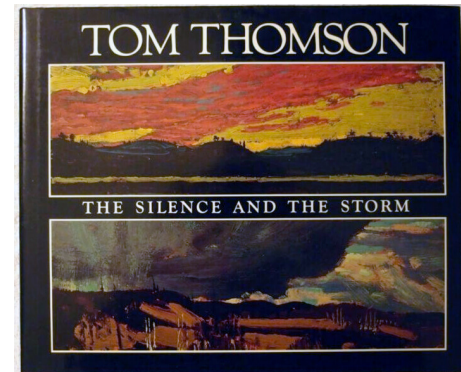
McInnis, Graham C. *Canadian Art*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1950.

McKay, Marilyn J. *Picturing the Land: Narrating Territories in Canadian Landscape Art, 1500–1950*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011.

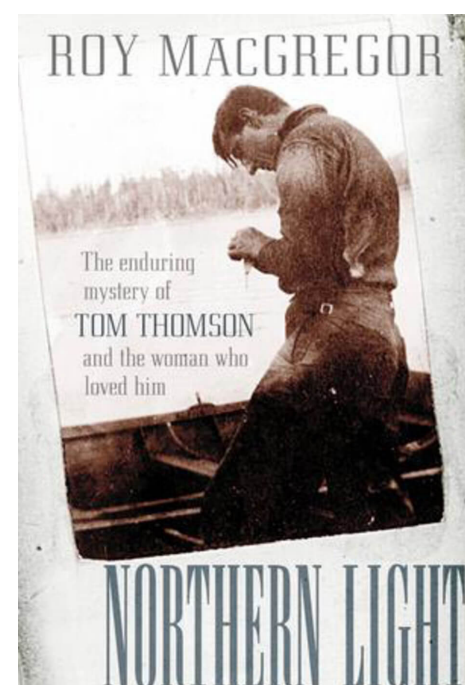
Mellen, Peter. *The Group of Seven*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970.

Millard, Laura. *Algonquin Memories: Tom Thomson in Algonquin Park*. Owen Sound, ON: Thomson Books, 1998. Exhibition catalogue organized by Tom Thomson Art Gallery for Algonquin Gallery.

Murray, Joan. *The Art of Tom Thomson*. Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1971. Exhibition catalogue.



Cover of the first edition of David P. Silcox and Harold Town's *Tom Thomson: The Silence and the Storm*.



Cover of *Northern Light: The Enduring Mystery of Tom Thomson and the Woman Who Loved Him* by Roy MacGregor.

———. *Tom Thomson: Catalogue Raisonné*.

<http://www.tomthomsoncatalogue.org>, 2015. Preliminary Draft

Catalogue Raisonné, including paintings, drawings, and commercial art.

———. *A Treasury of Tom Thomson*.

Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2011.

O'Brian, John, and Peter

White. *Beyond Wilderness: The Group of Seven, Canadian Identity, and Contemporary Art*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007.

Reid, Dennis. *Tom Thomson: The Jack Pine*. Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, National Museum of Canada, 1975.

Reid, Dennis, and Charles C. Hill, eds. *Tom Thomson*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2002. An indispensable resource, with essays by a number of curators on different aspects of Thomson's life and work. Included in the new research they present are the results of extensive studies of Thomson's paintings, using equipment such as X-rays, spectrometers, and micro-pigment analysis. In addition, Charles Hill, the foremost authority on Thomson, sets out a plausible dating of the paintings of Thomson's last five years.

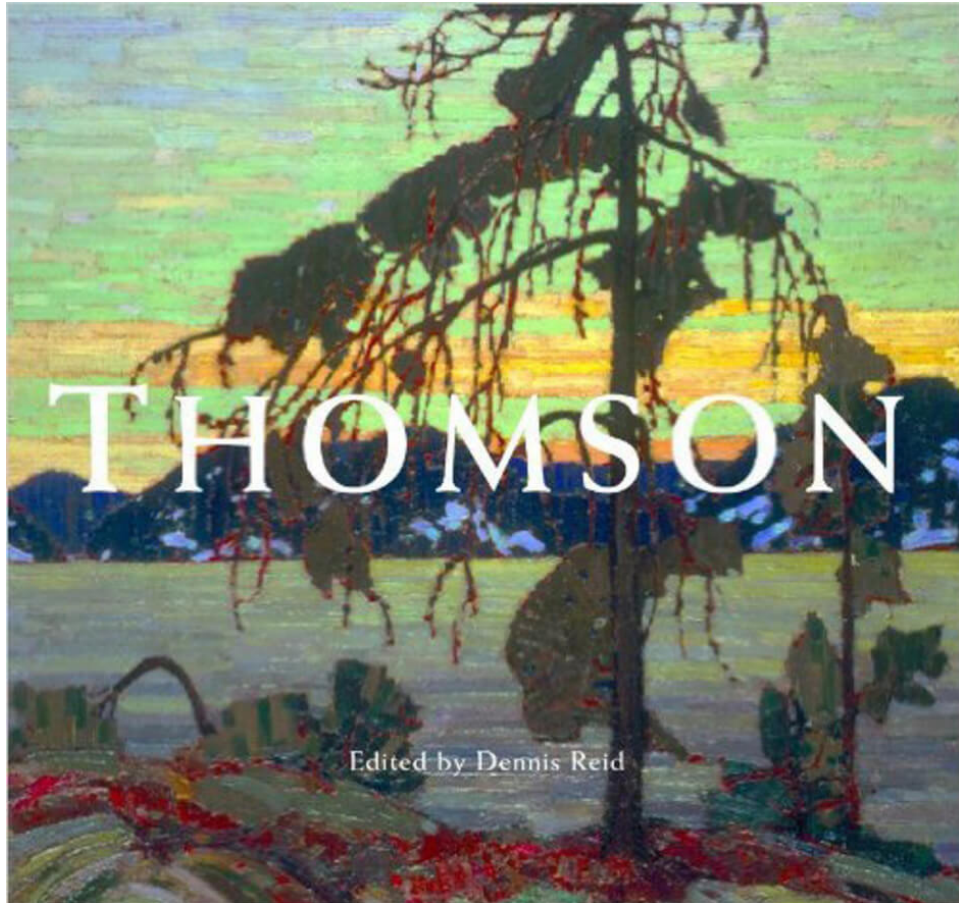
Robson, Albert Henry. *Tom Thomson*. Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1937. A good personal recollection.

Silcox, David P. *Tom Thomson: An Introduction to His Life and Art*. Willowdale, ON: Firefly Books, 2002.

———. *The Group of Seven and Tom Thomson*. Richmond Hill, ON: Firefly Books, 2003.

Silcox, David P., and Harold Town. *Tom Thomson: The Silence and the Storm*. 5th ed. Toronto: HarperCollins Canada, forthcoming 2016.

This book, an earlier edition of which is available in French, presents the largest number of Thomson's paintings, photographs, and ancillary works in print.



Cover of the exhibition catalogue *Tom Thomson* published in 2002 to correspond with the major touring exhibition organized by Charles C. Hill and Dennis Reid.

ARTICLES

Bordo, Jonathan. "Jack Pine: Wilderness Sublime or the Erasure of the Aboriginal Presence from the Canadian Landscape." *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27, no 4 (1992-93): 98-128.

Cameron, Ross D. "Tom Thomson, Antimodernism, and the Ideal of Manhood." *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 10 (1999): 185.

Fairley, Barker. "Tom Thomson and Others." *Rebel* 4, no 6 (1920): 244-48.

MacCallum, J.M. "Tom Thomson: Painter of the North." *Canadian Magazine* 1, no 5 (March 1918): 375-85.

MacDonald, J.E.H. "A Landmark of Canadian Art." *Rebel* 2, no 2 (1917): 46-48.
A fine personal recollection by an artist friend.

Machardy, Carolyn. "An Inquiry into the Success of Tom Thomson's *The West Wind*." *University of Toronto Quarterly* 68, no 3 (1999): 768-89.



Shot in Algonquin Park, Georgian Bay, Seattle, and Toronto, *West Wind: The Vision of Tom Thomson* features never-before-seen paintings by Thomson.

FILM

Of these three films, one tries to answer some of the questions raised about Thomson's death (*A Documentary Investigation into the Death of Tom Thomson*); one strives to deal with his life in a quasi-fictional way (*The Far Shore*)—the tug between art in the wilderness and the comforts of high society in Toronto's Rosedale; and one is a brilliant and beautiful feature documentary (*West Wind*), with much new information, gorgeous photography, and a close look at Thomson's paintings, with commentary from knowledgeable curators and critics.



TOM THOMSON

Life & Work by David P. Silcox

Hozer, Michèle, dir., and Peter Raymont, prod. *West Wind: The Vision of Tom Thomson*. Toronto: White Pine Pictures, 2011. Filmstrip, colour, 95 min.

Vaisbord, David, dir. *Dark Pines: A Documentary Investigation into the Death of Tom Thomson*. Vancouver: Laughing Mountain Communications, 2005. DV cam, colour, 48 min.

Wieland, Joyce, dir. *The Far Shore*. Toronto: Far Shore Inc., 1976. 35mm film, colour, 105 min.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DAVID P. SILCOX

David P. Silcox has enjoyed a long and distinguished career in the arts, his positions ranging from the first Senior Arts Officer of the Canada Council for the Arts and Associate Dean, Faculty of Fine Art, York University, to federal Assistant Deputy Minister of Communications (Culture) and Ontario Deputy Minister, Culture and Communications. Most recently he was president of Sotheby's Canada for twelve years. He has also written major prize-winning books, including *Painting Place: The Life and Work of David B. Milne*; *The Group of Seven and Tom Thomson*; and, with Harold Town, the groundbreaking *Tom Thomson: The Silence and the Storm*. In addition, he is the author of many articles and catalogues about Canadian art and artists.

Silcox has founded several important performing arts events in theatre, music, dance, and the visual arts in Canada. He has served on the boards of more than thirty cultural organizations, including the Stratford Festival, National Film Board, Toronto International Film Festival, CFDC (now Telefilm Canada), Royal Conservatory of Music, and Gardiner Museum.

Internationally, Silcox has served on the boards of Studio International, the Americas Advisory Board of the Praemium Imperiale arts prize (Japan), and the American Friends of Canada (now the Council for Canadian American Relations). He organized a major Canadian exhibition for the Edinburgh International Festival, and is chair of the Canadian Friends of Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, and a Trustee of the Canada House Trust, London.

To honour his contribution to culture and the arts in Canada, Silcox has received the Order of Canada, the Governor General's Award in Visual and Media Arts, and honorary doctorates from Victoria University in the University of Toronto and the University of Windsor. He is also a long-standing Senior Fellow at Massey College and a Fellow of the Royal Canadian Geographical Society.



"When I lived and worked at Hart House at the University of Toronto in the late 1950s and early 1960s, I saw Tom Thomson's dazzling painting *The Pointers* every day. Fred Varley's *Magic Tree* hung in my office, and works by Lawren Harris, A.Y. Jackson, and Arthur Lismer in nearby common rooms were constant friends. Acquisitions took a huge leap ahead in 1961–62, when an undergraduate cabal I supported sacked the conservative Art Advisory Committee and purchased great works by Jock Macdonald and Harold Town. Thomson and his friends would have cheered."



COPYRIGHT & CREDITS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS


From the Author

For his insights and contribution to my earlier work on Tom Thomson, thanks are due to Harold Town; to Joan Murray, who, in 1971, organized the first Thomson retrospective in thirty years; and to Iris Nowell, who carried out the basic research.

The ACI team expertly guided me through the complexities of preparing this first online book on Tom Thomson—particularly Rosemary Shipton, *éditrice extraordinaire*; John Geoghegan, super art sleuth; and Sara Angel, our intrepid leader.

From the Art Canada Institute

This online art book was made possible thanks to BMO Financial Group, Lead Sponsor for the Canadian Online Art Book Project. Much gratitude goes to the Title Sponsors for this publication: Consignor Canadian Fine Art and The McLean Foundation. The Art Canada Institute gratefully acknowledges the other sponsors for the 2014–15 Season: Aimia, Gluskin Sheff + Associates Inc., the Hal Jackman Foundation, K. James Harrison, Sandra L. Simpson, and TD Bank.

Thanks also to the Art Canada Institute Founding Patrons: Sara and Michael Angel, Jalynn H. Bennett, the Butterfield Family Foundation, David and Vivian Campbell, Albert E. Cummings, Kiki and Ian Delaney, the Fleck Family, Roger and Kevin Garland, the Gershon Iskowitz Foundation, Michelle Koerner and Kevin Doyle, Phil Lind, Sarah and Tom Milroy, Nancy McCain and Bill Morneau, Gerald Sheff and Shanitha Kachan, Sandra L. Simpson, Pam and Mike Stein, and Robin and David Young; as well as its Founding Partner Patrons: The Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation and Partners in Art. 

The ACI gratefully acknowledges the support and assistance of the Art Gallery of Alberta (Rochelle Ball); the Art Gallery of Ontario (Jim Shedden and Ebony Jansen); Carleton University Art Gallery (Sandra Dyck); Heffel Canada (Kirbi Pitt); Nancy Lang; the McMichael Canadian Art Collection (Janine Butler and Ki-in Wong); the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (Marie-Claude Saia); the National Gallery of Canada (Emily Antler and Raven Amiro); A.K. Prakash; Tom Thomson Art Gallery (David Huff); the University of Toronto (Heather Pigat and Daniella Sanader); the Vancouver Art Gallery (Danielle Currie); the Winnipeg Art Gallery (Nicole Fletcher); and private collectors who wish to remain anonymous.



SPONSOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LEAD SPONSOR



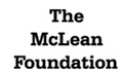
TITLE SPONSOR



2015–2016 SPONSORS OF THE CANADIAN ONLINE ART BOOK PROJECT



K. JAMES HARRISON



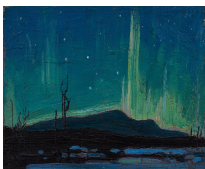
SANDRA L. SIMPSON



IMAGE SOURCES

Every effort has been made to secure permissions for all copyrighted material. The Art Canada Institute will gladly correct any errors or omissions.

Credit for Cover Image

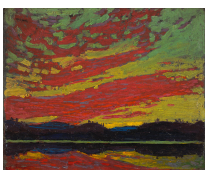


Tom Thomson, *Northern Lights*, 1916. (See below for details.)

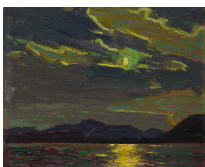
Credits for Banner Images



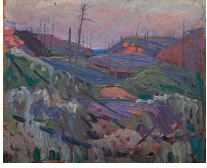
Biography: Studio portrait of Tom Thomson, c. 1910. (See below for details.)



Key Works: Tom Thomson, *Sunset*, 1915. (See below for details.)



Significance & Critical Issues: Tom Thomson, *Hot Summer Moonlight*, 1915. (See below for details.)



Style & Technique: Tom Thomson, *Fire-Swept Hills*, 1915. (See below for details.)



Sources & Resources: Tom Thomson, *Sketchbook* (page 32), c. 1905-11, Peel Art Gallery, Museum and Archives, Brampton (1993.130.3).

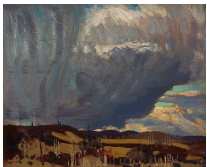


Where to See: Installation view of *Memorial Exhibition of Paintings by Tom Thomson*, Art Gallery of Toronto, 1920. (See below for details.)

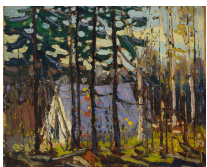
Credits for Works by Tom Thomson



After the Storm, 1917. Private collection.



Approaching Snowstorm, 1915. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, bequest of Dr. J.M. MacCallum, Toronto, 1944 (no. 4689).



Artist's Camp, *Canoe Lake*, Algonquin Park, 1915. Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



TOM THOMSON

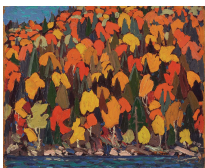
Life & Work by David P. Silcox



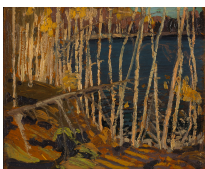
Autumn, Algonquin Park, 1916. A.K. Prakash Collection, Toronto.



Autumn Clouds, 1915. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, gift of R.A. Laidlaw, Toronto (1965, 1966.15.25).



Autumn Foliage, 1915. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift from the Reuben and Kate Leonard Canadian Fund, 1927 (no. 852).



Blue Lake: Sketch for "In the Northland", 1915. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, bequest of Dr. J.M. MacCallum, Toronto, 1944 (no. 4716).



Burned Over Land, 1916. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, gift of the founders, Robert and Signe McMichael, 1967 (1966.16.66).



Burns' Blessing, 1906. Tom Thomson Art Gallery, Owen Sound, Ontario.

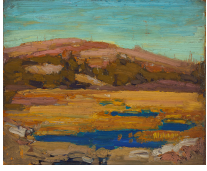


The Canoe, 1912. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift from the J.S. McLean Collection, Toronto, 1969, donated by the Ontario Heritage Foundation, 1988 (L69.48).



TOM THOMSON

Life & Work by David P. Silcox



Cranberry Marsh, 1916. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, bequest of Dr. J.M. MacCallum, Toronto, 1944 (no. 4698).



Decorative Illustration: A Blessing by Robert Burns, 1909. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario (1972.18.5).



Decorative Landscape: Birches, 1915-16. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, bequest of Dr. J.M. MacCallum, Toronto, 1944 (no. 4724).



Decorative Landscape: Quotation from Maurice Maeterlinck, c. 1908. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, gift of Margaret Thomson Tweedale, Toronto, 1979 (1980.3.3).



Decorative Panel (II), 1915-16. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, bequest of Dr. J.M. MacCallum, Toronto, 1944 (no. 4718).



Decorative Panel (III), 1915-16. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, bequest of Dr. J.M. MacCallum, Toronto, 1944 (no. 4719).

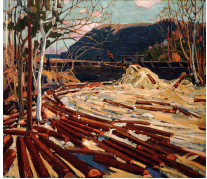


TOM THOMSON

Life & Work by David P. Silcox



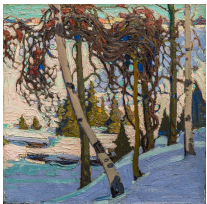
Decorative Panel (IV), 1915-16. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, bequest of Dr. J.M. MacCallum, Toronto, 1944 (no. 4720).



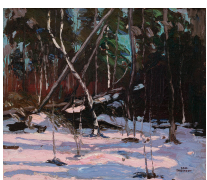
The Drive, 1916-17. Macdonald Stewart Art Centre, Guelph, Ontario, purchased by the Ontario Agricultural College with funds raised by students, faculty, and staff, 1926 (UG1926.134).



Drowned Land, 1912. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (no. 2449).



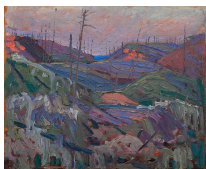
Early Snow, 1916-17. Winnipeg Art Gallery, acquired with the assistance of a grant from the Canadian Government, approved by the Minister of Canadian Heritage under the terms of the Cultural Property Export and Import Act, and with contributions by The Winnipeg Foundation, The Thomas Sill Foundation Inc., The Winnipeg Art Gallery Foundation Inc., Mr. and Mrs. G.B. Wiswell Fund, DeFehr Foundation Inc., Loch and Mayberry Fine Art Inc, and several anonymous donors (2000-2001).



Early Snow, Algonquin Park, 1916. Private collection. Photograph courtesy of Sotheby's, Inc. ©



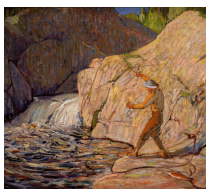
Early Spring, Canoe Lake, 1917. Private collection, photography courtesy of Heffel.



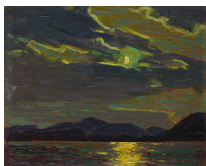
Fire-Swept Hills, 1915. Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



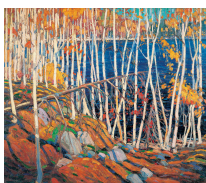
First Snow in Autumn, 1916. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, bequest of Dr. J.M. MacCallum, Toronto, 1944 (no. 4670).



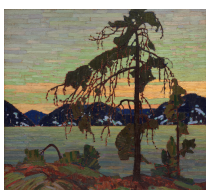
The Fisherman, 1916-17. Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton, gift of the Ernest E. Poole Foundation, 1975 (no. 68.6.84).



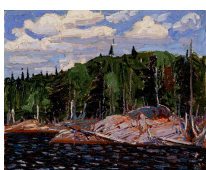
Hot Summer Moonlight, 1915. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, bequest of Dr. J.M. MacCallum, Toronto, 1944 (no. 4648).



In the Northland, 1915-16. Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, gift of Friends of the Museum, Dr. Francis J. Shepherd, Sir Vincent Meredith, Drs. Lauterman and W. Gardner and Mrs. Hobart Molson, 1922 (1922.179).



The Jack Pine, 1916-17. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (no. 1519).



Lakeside, Spring, Algonquin Park, 1915. Private collection.



TOM THOMSON

Life & Work by David P. Silcox



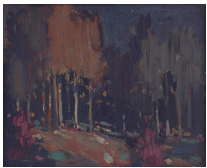
Moonlight, 1913-14. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (no. 943).



Moonlight, c. 1913-14. Private collection.



Mowat Lodge (or Fraser's Lodge), 1915. Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton, gift of Mrs. Gertrude Poole, Edmonton, 1977 (77.30).



Nocturne, 1914. Art Gallery of Windsor, bequest of Miss Margaret Bowlby, 1988 (no. 88.26)



Nocturne: Forest Spires, 1916. Vancouver Art Gallery, presented in memory of Robert A. de Lotbinière-Harwood, by his friends, 1952 (52.8).



Northern Lake, 1912-13. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift of the Government of the Province of Ontario, 1972 (72/25).

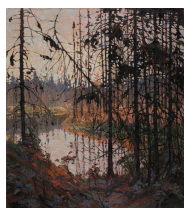


Northern Lights, 1916. Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.

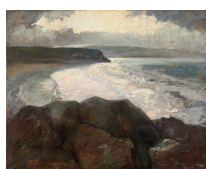


TOM THOMSON

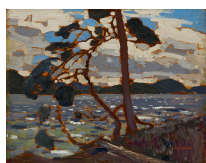
Life & Work by David P. Silcox



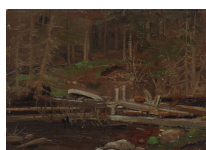
Northern River, 1914-15. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (no. 1055).



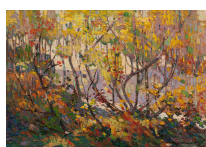
Northern Shore, 1912-13. Agnes Etherington Art Centre, Kingston, gift of Dr. and Mrs. Philip N. Golomb, Kingston, 1972 (AE 15-046).



Oil Sketch for The West Wind, 1916. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift from the J.S. McLean Collection, Toronto, 1969, donated by the Ontario Heritage Foundation, 1988 (L69.49).



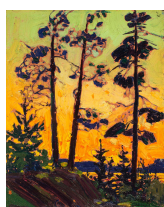
Old Lumber Dam, Algonquin Park, 1912. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, bequest of Dr. J.M. MacCallum, Toronto, 1944 (no. 4671).



Opulent October, 1915-16. Private collection.



Path behind Mowat Lodge, 1917. Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Pine Trees at Sunset, 1915. Private collection.



TOM THOMSON

Life & Work by David P. Silcox



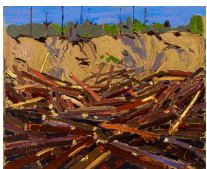
The Pointers, 1916-17. Hart House Permanent Collection, University of Toronto.



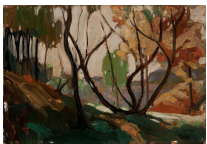
Poplars by a Lake, 1916. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, bequest of Vincent Massey, Toronto, 1944 (no. 15553).



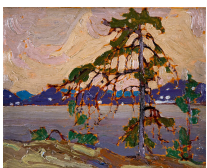
The Rapids, 1917. Private collection.



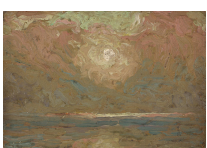
Sandbank with Logs, 1916. Thomson Collection, Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



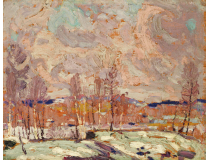
Sketch for "Opulent October," 1915. Private collection.



Sketch for "The Jack Pine," 1916. The Weir Foundation, RiverBrink, Queenston, Ontario (982.65).



Sky ("The Light That Never Was"), 1913. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (no. 4629).



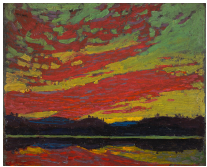
Spring Flood, 1917. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, gift of R.A. Laidlaw, Toronto, 1965 (1966.15.23).



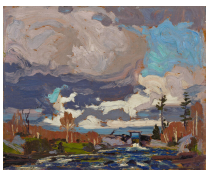
Study for "Northern River," 1914-15. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (82/176).



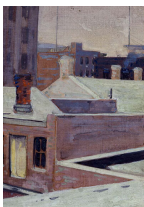
Study of a Woman's Head, c. 1903. Tom Thomson Art Gallery, Owen Sound, Ontario, gift of Fraser Thomson, 1967 (967.015).



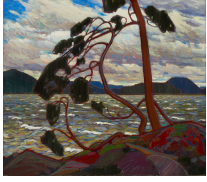
Sunset, 1915. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, bequest of Dr. J.M. MacCallum, Toronto, 1944 (no. 4701).



Tea Lake Dam, 1917. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, purchased with funds donated by R.A. Laidlaw (1970.1.4).

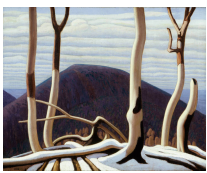


View from the Window of Grip, c. 1908-11. City of Toronto Art Collection (A84-34).



The West Wind, 1916-17. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift of the Canadian Club of Toronto, 1926 (no. 784).

Credits for Photographs and Works by Other Artists



Above Lake Superior, c.1922, by Lawren Harris. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift from the Reuben and Kate Leonard Canadian Fund, 1929 (1335).



The Art Room, Grip Limited, Toronto, c. 1911-12. National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Ottawa. Photo © NGC.



Beaver Lodge, I, c. 1914, photograph by Tom Thomson. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (3567570).



Birch Tree, c. 1916, by Lawren Harris. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, gift from the Friends of Canadian Art Fund, 1938 (2468).



Breaking a Road, 1894, by William Cruikshank. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (no. 572).



TOM THOMSON

Life & Work by David P. Silcox



The cairn constructed in memory of Tom Thomson at Canoe Lake, Algonquin Park. Photograph by J.E.H. MacDonald, September 1917. Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Canoeing through Drowned Land, I, c. 1912, photograph by Tom Thomson. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (PA-193562).



A Copse, Evening, 1918, by A.Y. Jackson. Beaverbrook Collection of War Art, Canadian War Museum, Ottawa (CWM 19710261-0186).



A hand-tinted photo of the Thomson brothers, likely taken at the Seattle Engraving Company, c. 1902. Courtesy of John Libby Fine Arts, Toronto.



Indian Encampment on Lake Huron, c. 1845, by Paul Kane. Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto (3597).



A Lake in Southern Ontario, III, c. 1911, photograph by Tom Thomson. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (e002712902).



Landscape, n.d., by Harry van der Weyden. Reproduced on page 350 of *The Studio*, vol. 31, 1904.



TOM THOMSON

Life & Work by David P. Silcox



Members of the Group of Seven at the Arts and Letters Club in Toronto in 1920. Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Night on the Skeena River, 1926, by A.Y. Jackson. Private collection, courtesy of Galerie Alan Klinkhoff.



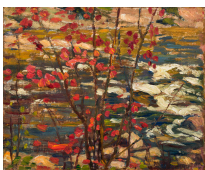
Portrait of Dr. J.M. MacCallum ("A Cynic"), 1917, by A. Curtis Williamson. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, bequest of Dr. J.M. MacCallum, Toronto, 1944 (no. 4734).



Portrait of Tom Thomson, 2013, by Kim Dorland. Collection of the artist.



Publicity still from Joyce Wieland's *The Far Shore*, 1977.



The Red Maple, 1914, by A.Y. Jackson. McMichael Canadian Art Collection, Kleinburg, Ontario, gift of Mr. S. Walter Stewart (1968.8.18).



Stoke-by-Nayland, c. 1810-11, by John Constable. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Charles B. Curtis Fund, 1926 (26.128).



TOM THOMSON

Life & Work by David P. Silcox



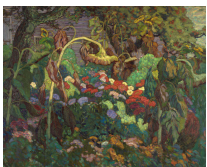
The Studio Building. National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Ottawa. Photo © NGC.



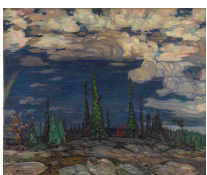
Studio portrait of Tom Thomson, c. 1910. The Morrison Family collection.



Study for "A Sunday on La Grande Jatte," 1884, by Georges Seurat. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, bequest of Sam A. Lewisohn, 1951.



The Tangled Garden, 1916, by J.E.H. MacDonald. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, gift of W.M. Southam, F.N. Southam, and H.S. Southam, 1937, in memory of their brother Richard Southam (no. 4291).



Terre Sauvage, 1913, by A.Y. Jackson. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa (no. 4351).



The Thomson children, c. 1887.



TOM THOMSON

Life & Work by David P. Silcox



Tom Thomson at about the age of twenty, c. 1898. The Morrison Family collection.



Tom Thomson at Tea Lake Dam, Algonquin Park, 1916. Courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.



Tom Thomson in the canoe he painted dove grey, 1912. National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Ottawa. Photo © NGC.



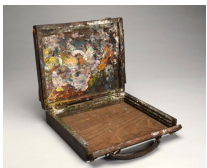
Photograph of Tom Thomson on Canoe Lake, c. 1915-16. [tk].



Tom Thomson with his city visitors in Algonquin Park, fall 1914. National Gallery of Canada Library and Archives, Ottawa. Photo © NGC.



Tom Thomson's business card, c. 1904. Location unknown.



Tom Thomson's sketch box. Study Collection, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



Vintermånsken (Winter Moonlight), 1895, by Gustav Fjæstad. Nationalmuseum, Stockholm.



Vinternatt i fjellene (Winter Night in the Mountains), 1901, by Harald Sohlberg. Private collection.



White Canoe, 1990-91, by Peter Doig. Private collection.



Winifred Trainor, c. 1914, photograph by Tom Thomson. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa (3567410).

BOOK CREDITS

Publisher

Sara Angel

Executive Editor

Kendra Ward

French Editorial Director

Dominique Denis

Image Research Director

John Geoghegan

Chief Copy Editor

Ruth Gaskill

Senior Web Manager

Simone Wharton

Digital Layout Manager

Sara Rodriguez



TOM THOMSON

Life & Work by David P. Silcox

Editor

Rosemary Shipton

Copy Editor

Judy Phillips

Translator

Nathalie de Blois

English Web Intern

Heather Pierce

French Web Intern

Natalie Doak

Design Template

Studio Blackwell

COPYRIGHT

© 2015 Art Canada Institute. All rights reserved.

ISBN 978-1-4871-0075-9

Art Canada Institute

Massey College, University of Toronto

4 Devonshire Place

Toronto, ON M5S 2E1

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Silcox, David P., 1937-, author

Tom Thomson : life & work / David P. Silcox.

Includes bibliographical references.

Contents: Biography – Key works – Significance & critical issues – Style & technique – Sources & resources – Where to see.

Electronic monograph.

ISBN 978-1-4871-0079-7 (pdf). –ISBN 978-1-4871-0077-3 (epub)

1. Thomson, Tom, 1877-1917. 2. Thomson, Tom, 1877-1917–

Art Canada Institute, issuing body II. Thomson, Tom, 1877-1917. Paintings.

Selections. III. Title. IV. Title: Tom Thomson (2015)

ND249.T5S543 2015

759.11

C2015-905502-4